

No 767

Feb. 12th 1913

5 Cents.

PUCK AND LUCK

THE HOUSE OF SKULLS
OR THE BOY MINERS OF BLIZZARD BAY

AND OTHER STORIES

By Jas. C. Merritt



"I am in for it now, sure!" thought George Brandon, and so he was, for one of the Indians pulled away the bear skin which covered him before he had time to get on his feet.

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER. 168 W. 23rd ST.
NEW-YORK



PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1913, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 168 West 23d St., New York.
New Application for Second-Class Entry pending.

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—OR—

THE BOY MINERS OF BLIZZARD BAY

By JAS. C. MERRITT

CHAPTER I.

ABANDONED IN THE STORM.

One Sunday afternoon in the month of April, about three years ago, just about the time the wonderful gold discoveries in the Klondike country began to be first talked about, a small steamer, called the Sea Lion, was in hard straits among the islands on the inside route between Alaska and Seattle.

It was snowing and miserably cold and chilly; the wind was blowing a perfect blizzard and there was not one among the dozen or so passengers in the cabin who was not anxiously looking forward to their arrival at Seattle, who did not feel absolutely certain that the captain had lost his reckoning altogether and was entirely off his course.

Still nobody dared to say so, and what would have been the use of saying so? For it is a poor business to put out one's own ideas to make other people uncomfortable in a time of danger, when said ideas cannot possibly do any good.

At least that is what George Brandon thought that dreary Sunday afternoon, and his friend Harry Brown agreed with him.

They were doing their best to make things lively and keep the passengers in good humor, and Miss Blyburn, a young lady of twenty or thereabouts, whose mannish dress and manners had attracted some unfavorable comment on board the Sea Lion, was trying her best, too.

"Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, we will sing that hymn again," she exclaimed, turning around on the piano stool. "Nothing like music to cheer us up. Mr. Brandon, I depend upon you for the tenor, as before. Mr. Brown, you will try to do a little better with the bass this time, I am sure. No, no. No offense meant. We are not all singers and I am sorry any of you have to sing to such a poor accompaniment as I can produce. Now, then, here we go."

And Miss Blyburn started off on a good old hymn, in which almost all the passengers heartily joined.

All but one, a tall young gentleman, with perfect fitting clothes, high collar and stiff ultra-English manners, who kicked and sneered at everything and had an unpleasant way of staring at you through the monocle, or single glass, which he made the most distressing efforts to hold in his eye.

"What a nuisance!" he drawled, addressing himself to a rough miner, who did not sing simply because he couldn't speak above a whisper on account of a cold. "That squalling makes me tired. As for playing the piano, Miss Blyburn don't know the first thing about it, and—"

"Say, young feller, if you don't like the singing get out!" whispered the miner, turning on him suddenly. "Go up on deck and kick at the weather, but quit your kicking here."

"Really, you are very impolite," drawled the dude; "but that is just what I was about to do. It's bad enough on deck, but really it is worse to be shut up here and forced to listen to such caterwauling. I shall go and complain to the captain. This annoying of passengers who are forced to take refuge in the cabin must be stopped."

The miner would have liked first rate to have taken the fellow up by the coat collar and kicked him, but as it was he only scowled, while Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald turned up the collar of his great coat, which he had been wearing in the cabin, and started up the stairs.

The steamer was rolling fearfully, as she had been for an hour or more, and when the kicking dude had got up two steps he was thrown violently against the partition on the left, banging his empty head and knocking his monocle out of his eye.

He scarcely had time to replace it again and go up one or two more steps when he was thrown with equal violence against the partition on the right, and in that lurch several of the singers gathered about the piano were nearly thrown off their feet.

"Worse and worse!" cried Miss Blyburn, cheerfully. "It's a good thing we are nearly all old sailors or there would be some sick sculs among us this day. I wonder what in the world is the matter with the old tub now."

She had scarcely spoken when there was a fearful shock, which caused the rotten old Sea Lion to tremble from stem to stern.

"Oh, my good gracious!" screamed Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald, and he came tumbling down the cabin stairs and fell sprawling at the feet of the singers in a most undignified way.

Some laughed, but others knew only too well what it meant. "We are on a rock," cried George Brandon.

"Yes, and we've stove our bottom all to blazes," cried the

old miner. "Gentlemen and Miss Blyburn, I don't want to scare any of ye, but—"

Bang! Bang!

Again the shock came, twice repeated, with deafening noise each time, and the ripping and tearing of the steamer's timbers could be distinctly heard.

There was something of more importance than Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald to be thought of now.

The men all rushed on deck. George Brandon and Harry Brown alone hanging back to look to the safety of Miss Blyburn, who was the only woman beside the stewardess on board.

"Don't be scared," said George. "It may not be as bad as they think."

"Bless your heart, I'm not a bit more frightened than you are, George Brandon," exclaimed that lively little lady. "Why, you are as white as a sheet. Brace up. A fellow can only die once. What's worrying me is my manuscript. I'll get that and be with you in no time. Don't stay back for me."

Thus saying Miss Blyburn popped into her stateroom and George and Harry hurried on deck.

"Isn't she a stunner?" said George, as they ascended the stairs. "I wonder what her business is?"

"I'll bet you she's a reporter for one of the 'Frisco papers," replied Harry. "You heard her speak about her manuscript. It can't mean anything else."

As soon as the boys stepped on the deck they knew that the steamer was doomed.

Through the thickly falling snow the dim outlines of an ironbound coast could be seen; an enormous mass of rocks, between two and three hundred feet high, towered before them, against which the sea was breaking with fearful force.

Between the steamer and the base of this awful bluff great black rocks rose out of the water here and there, looking like so many black tombstones, around which the water surged and roared with that terrific force which the Pacific Ocean can exert when it once gets aroused.

It was against one of these rocks that the Sea Lion had first struck. Slipping off of this and passing on she had run between two others and lodged there and now, careened away over to one side, she was filling. Unless something could be done instantly to relieve her she was doomed.

"Bad business, George!" exclaimed Harry. "We shall never get out of this snap alive, that's one sure thing."

"Where's the captain? Why don't they do something?" cried George, staring around.

Where was the captain? sure enough. Where were the crew?

Besides the passengers not a soul was to be seen on deck. George and Harry ran here, there and everywhere, but could find no one.

Others assisted. The cry went up that even the engine room was deserted.

Before this was discovered all hands knew that the two best boats were gone.

"They have abandoned the steamer and left us to our fate," cried George. "The cowards! No doubt they saw some way of escape and as the old tub is short of boats they took the best and skipped."

It was undoubtedly so.

The rage and despair of some of the passengers was fearful to witness.

In the steerage were several Hungarian miners, rough fellows, who crowded on deck with the rest, and no sooner did they learn the situation than they made a rush for one of the two remaining boats and the other miners made a rush for them.

A fearful scene followed.

Shots were fired, knives were freely used.

Several were killed outright, others were crowded overboard into the sea and when at last the boats were launched George Brandon and Harry Brown, who stood apart with drawn revolvers ready for instant use, protecting Miss Blyburn, who clung silently to them, were the ones left behind.

There had been no chance for them from the first unless they joined in the fight and scramble, and this the two brave American lads, for they were both under twenty years of age, refused to do.

"Keep back! Keep out of it!" George kept saying. "I wouldn't go in either of those boats for any money. Our chances are better where we are."

"Room for one more!" shouted the old miner, who was in the second boat and just about to push off. "Pass down, Miss Blyburn, Brandon, or come yourself, but be quick whichever you do."

"Will you go, Miss Blyburn?" asked George, quietly. "Now is your chance."

The girl hesitated for an instant. "No, I will stay with you," she said, "for I know that neither of you two will go and leave me."

"I certainly shall not," said George.

"Nor I," echoed Harry. "If we don't go together, we both stay here."

"And you have held back to protect me," said Miss Blyburn. "No, I stay, too."

"Coming or not!" shouted the miner. "We can't stay here all night."

"No," called George. "Go on with your boat, you cowards. Men who will desert a lady at a time like this are not fit company for her in any case."

"Take that for your impudence," cried the miner, drawing his revolver and sending a shot up at George, who was leaning over the rail.

The shot missed and the rowers pulled away from the steamer, pulled wildly, clumsily, so much so that before they had gone ten yards the boat was driven against one of the rocks.

A wild shout went up, cries of rage and despair.

"She's stove in and they are lost!" cried Harry.

At the same instant a mountainous wave struck the boat.

It rose upon the crest and overturned as it fell.

A few seconds later and no trace of either the boat or its cowardly occupants could be seen.

CHAPTER II.

WRECKED ON AN IRONBOUND COAST.

The other boat meanwhile had disappeared in the darkness and storm and the situation in which our two brave boys and Miss Blyburn found themselves was anything but a cheerful one, still it is unnecessary to speak of their thankfulness that that they were where they were and had not gone with the boat.

Miss Blyburn's cheerfulness was wonderful.

She gave one low, shuddering cry when she saw the fate of the boat and for a moment covered her face with her hands.

When she looked up again she set her lips firmly, and, grasping the little hand-bag which she had brought up out of the cabin, exclaimed:

"Well, boys. We did not lose anything by hanging back it seems. I'm ready. What do you want me to do?"

"There was no chance for those fellows from the first," said George. "They were a hard lot. I'd rather have gone with the Huns than with them."

"It's my opinion that there is no safety for the boats anyhow," added Harry. "We'll stick to the old Sea Lion for the present at least."

"What became of Mr. Fitzgerald?" asked Miss Blyburn. "I saw him crowding with the rest, but I didn't see him when the boat pushed off."

"He may be among the dead up there," replied George. "I saw him pull a revolver and fire. The fellow was so absolutely frightened that he had no sort of idea what he was doing."

"Small loss anyhow," added Harry. "Well, let's go forward and see how we are lying now."

At the same moment a dismal cry was heard in the direction of the cabin.

"Oh, save me! Save me! Don't go and leave me to die!"

"Fitz, as true as I live!" cried Miss Blyburn.

And sure enough it was. Mr. Herbert Fitzgerald, with his clothes all ripped and torn and his face besmeared with blood, came staggering toward them, the picture of terror and despair.

"Where's the boat? Where's the boat?" he cried, catching sight of the boys. "Tell them to wait for me."

"Wait for you! Why, they have gone to Davy Jones' long ago!" retorted Harry. "So they knocked you out, did they? You didn't make anything by trying to crowd ahead of everyone else."

"Gone!" gasped Fitzgerald. "Gone! What about you?"

"Left behind and glad of it."

"Oh, I shall be drowned! I shall be drowned. What shall I do? Tell me what to do."

"Go get a petticoat and put it on, sissy," whispered Harry in his ear, and he hurried after George and Miss Blyburn, who had now started forward, disgusted with the cowardly dude.

"Wonder how he came to be left behind?" said Miss Blyburn, turning her head away to avoid the sight of one of the Hungarians, who had been shot dead and now lay stretched out upon the deck.

"I expect he was knocked out and became unconscious," replied George. "You see what he is. 'Tisn't likely he would have kept still so long any other way."

The sea was breaking over the rocks between which the prow of the steamer had been run with fearful force, and the spray dashed in George's face as he leaned over the rail.

Further on the waves were dashing against the wall of rock with thunderous noise. It was a sight awful, yet grand, to see the water strike and go flying up against the bluff and then before it had fairly settled down to be forced up again, by the rush of another mighty wave.

"There's no hope for us, I judge," said Miss Blyburn, coolly. "None whatever so far as the steamer is concerned," replied George. "You see when the captain abandoned the wheel the engine had probably stopped, although I can't say I noticed its stopping. The wind drove her head on against the rocks with just force enough to wedge her in. If the engine had been going I suppose the whole bottom would have been ripped out of her and we would have sunk long ago."

"Like enough," said Harry, "and we are sinking now. She is all settling down astern."

"That's right. Something has got to be done mighty quick, old man."

"Mr. Brandon, may I say a word?" asked Miss Blyburn.

"Why, certainly, but I'm just George, not mister. I'm only a boy."

"Indeed, you are more of a man than anyone else I have struck on this steamer, always excepting Mr. Brown."

"Harry, if you please," said that individual. "Look here, Miss Blyburn, we are only a couple of 'Frisco boys, who took a run up to Alaska for the house we work for, Doubleday & Downer, the salmon cannery, down in Front street. Maybe you know them?"

"No, I don't, boys, but listen to me. If you are only boys I am only a girl. I am only nineteen. It is not likely that I shall be saved, but you may be. I am a reporter working on the Morning Call. I have just made a run to the Klondike and back again in the interest of my paper. Here is my manuscript all written up. I want you to take it to the Call and tell them I died in the harness. That's all; put it in your pocket, George, and don't say a word. Now, I am ready to do anything you say."

"And what am I to do?" asked a dismal voice behind them, and there was Mr. Fitzgerald again, rather calmer in his manner, but still very much scared.

"I'm blest if I know and I was going to say I didn't care," replied George. "I have my own opinion about such fellows as you."

"Every man must look out for himself, I suppose. Don't be too hard on a fellow. Say, whatever you do you won't go away and leave me behind?"

"I make no promises," replied George, coldly.

"If you are saved and I am not you may as well know who I am," continued the dude. "I am the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald, of—"

"Hold on!" broke in George. "I don't want your message. Write what you have to say on a piece of paper and hand it to me. Know why I say it? Well, it's because I don't believe you are any more an Englishman than I am, but I do believe you can lie as fast as a horse can trot."

"You are nothing," drawled the dude, falling back into his old style. "If we ever get on shore I shall certainly challenge you. Remember, you have called me a coward and that's enough."

"Oh, bother your challenge. You make me tired," snapped George. "Don't speak to me again."

"Don't be so harsh with him, George," said Miss Blyburn; "two minutes may settle our fate."

"I have my reasons," replied George. "He's no good and I know it. Look! Look! See the wave! Isn't it a monster? I was thinking about a raft, but you see for yourself how hopeless it all is."

"Look out! It's going to douse us!" shouted Harry. "Catch hold of something. Quick! Look out for yourself, Fitzy, or you'll be swept away!"

George threw his arm about Miss Blyburn and clutched one of the davits, Harry seizing the other, but the dull dude did not seem to comprehend.

"Sir, I allow no man to address me as Fitzy," he exclaimed, bristling up. "You are beneath me or I should challenge you. I'd tweak your nose for you if it was not for the presence of the lady; yes I would."

"Oh, go drown yourself," sneered Harry, and all in an instant his advice came near being followed, for the monster wave broke over the Sea Lion, deluging her decks and almost sweeping all off their feet.

The Hon. Fitz met with just this fate.

He had neglected to provide for the emergency and before he knew where he was at his feet were swept from under him; coughing and spluttering and calling piteously for help, he was swept against the rail.

"There comes another," shouted Harry.

"We are lost," gasped George; "that one will fix us."

And, indeed, it looked so. A wall of water fully fifty feet high came rushing toward the wreck.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT KIND OF A HOUSE IS THIS?

Yes, it certainly looked like the end and surely nothing could have saved the little party, who clung desperately to the wreck of the Sea Lion, if that monster wave had ever broken over the deck.

But as luck would have it the wave broke before it reached them and the full force of the mighty swell lifted the steamer out of its trap high above the half sunken rocks and hurled it toward the cliff.

It was an awful moment. Death seemed very near.

Not a word was spoken. George held Miss Blyburn tight, clutching the davit; the blinding spray mingled with the whirl of snow flakes shut out the cliffs for the moment, but they were there and the boys knew they were, and it seemed as though nothing could save them from instant destruction; and, indeed, nothing could have saved them if the steamer had been hurled against the rocks.

But it was not to be.

The force of the wave was not quite sufficient to do it; if the wind had been blowing straight in the direction of the rocky wall that would have helped and, no doubt, finished the job.

But it was not. It blew slightly off the direct line and it blew the steamer with it.

The first thing George and Harry knew they went sliding around the point of the bluff and then whirling on into a little bay, striking hard upon the sand and lodging there, the wave on its retreat leaving them high above the water line.

"Hooray! Saved!" shouted George. "This way, Miss Blyburn. We may only have a moment, but that's enough to give us back our lives."

The ship's ladder was over the side, near the davits, and as George hurried Miss Blyburn toward it a dripping form rose at his feet and made a rush to head him off.

It was the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald.

Several times since that gentleman started to leave the cabin he had come down heavy on his rather prominent proboscis and now he had the same experience again, only this time he fell on the back of his head and his nose got a good square taste of George Brandon's clenched fist.

"None of that," cried George. "You will be saved, but ladies first. Now, then, Miss Blyburn, before the next wave comes."

The brave little woman climbed down the ladder and sprang to the beach.

"Harry next," cried George.

"Go on yourself. The wave is coming," objected Harry.

"Go!" said George so sternly that Harry had nothing for it but to obey.

"Now, then, Fitzy," added George, coolly, "the way is clear for the dude."

The Hon. Fitz did not stand on the order of his going, but simply went, hustling down the ladder without even offering to challenge George again.

George followed hastily, but he was too late to avoid a drenching and ten seconds later his fate would have been sealed, for another wave broke upon the beach, passing clear over the steamer and carrying the wreck back in the bay.

But George had already jumped, and, landing in water knee deep, he fought bravely against the fearful undertow and found himself safe at last.

Meanwhile Harry had hurried Miss Blyburn up out of harm's way, and as for the Hon. Fitz, he had sprinted so famously that he was not to be seen through the snow, al-

though he turned up again all right a few moments later full of fight and very mad. Indeed, he offered to challenge George then and there.

"Say, if you don't shut your head and keep quiet I'm going to kick you," drawled George, in imitation of the dude's own style of speech. "Here we are safe for the moment and I'm tired of this nonsense. Miss Blyburn, you had better take back your manuscript. The danger is all over now."

"Keep it, George," said the girl. "Now, by the way, my name is Edna and that's the name you are going to call me from this on. Where are we, anyhow? Harry and I are dry and comfortable, but you are wet to the skin and will have pneumonia sure if something isn't done."

"How about me?" groaned the Hon. Fitz. "I am wet to the skin, too."

"Oh, you don't count," said Edna—we propose to take her at her word and call her by that name—"please don't speak to me or I shall feel like trying George's plan to make you hold your tongue."

"Where are we, anyhow?" asked Harry. "On the mainland of British Columbia or on an island? Does anybody know?"

"I'm sure I don't," said Edna, "but I do know that all this will make a splendid story. Every move made is going to pay me."

It was going to pay George and Harry, too, if they had only known it, but of this we shall have occasion to speak later on.

"The rocks seem to set a long way in here," said Harry. "I can't see any trace of them looking in a straight line."

"And that's the way we have got to go," replied George. "What we want is to find a place of shelter and driftwood to build a fire. Let us hurry on. I'm afraid this is only an uninhabited island, but we will hope for the best."

As they walked on up the beach the snow began to let up and after a few moments stopped altogether.

Here on the beach it melted as fast as it fell, but soon they struck the drifts, where its depth was over a foot, and this made their progress both difficult and slow.

George's heart sank. He saw no chance of finding shelter. His wet garments were beginning to freeze and he was fearfully chilled. Still it was the month of April and the actual temperature was not very low.

"If I may be allowed to speak without running the risk of being kicked, I would like to call your attention to that light on ahead there," said the Hon. Fitz, suddenly.

"Where?" demanded George.

Fitz pointed.

"You have sharp eyes, Fitzy," said George. "That's a light all right and it has a hopeful look."

"Can it be a house?" asked Edna.

"More like it's a fire in front of some Indian lodge."

"Heavens! We shall all be scalped! Fitzy, this won't do for you."

"Say, I'll forgive you all if you will only stop calling me Fitzy," said the dude. "I'm in the same boat with the rest of you. Might as well be civil to a fellow! Now, come!"

"We'll get up to the light and think about it," said Harry, and they hurried on through the snow.

A moment later and the light flared up with great brilliancy. This was on account of the rocky wall on their right, which had partially obscured it. Passing around a turn in this wall brought it into full view and the boys burst out with a cry of surprise.

"Great Scott, what a long house!" exclaimed George. "What can it mean?"

There, right in front of them, stood a low, one-story structure, built of logs and at least two hundred feet in length.

"It must be a fish cannery," said Edna.

"Indeed it isn't," replied George. "No fish cannery here. I know every one on the coast."

The light was shining through the dozen or more windows, but not a soul was visible around the house.

It happened to be more convenient for our party to approach the house at its end and there they saw an open door with the light streaming through.

"It's some Indian arrangement, you may rely upon it," said George, "but here goes to find out. Follow me."

He walked boldly toward the door, so closely followed by the others that they entered the long, narrow structure immediately after him.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from all the party as they locked around.

The walls of the long house on both sides, as far as they could see, were lined with human skulls, so closely packed together that one could scarcely have put his finger between them.

In the middle of the earth floor a great fire of logs blazed.

"Look out!" exclaimed George. "There's some one beyond the fire!"

Two figures had suddenly risen up behind the blazing logs.

They were Indians clothed in bear skins and blankets, men of great age both of them. Their faces were hideously wrinkled and their hair hung down over their shoulders in long white locks.

"Ugh! Ugh! No pale face come here!" cried one as both stood staring at Edna and the boys.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY IN BLIZZARD BAY.

"Come away! Come away, out of this dreadful place!" whispered the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald. "My good gracious! Those Indians will kill us all."

"Rats!" exclaimed George. "Don't you fret, Fitzy! Those men are both regular old fossils. Let me talk to them. I'll soon make them friends."

Thus saying, George started toward the fire with his hands outstretched.

The two old Indians, who seemed to be the guardians of the House of Skulls, stared at him, but did not speak again.

As he drew still nearer they suddenly dropped down behind the fire and disappeared.

"Look out, George!" cried Harry. "They are up to some game, sure!"

"Yes; do be careful, George!" called Edna. "Take no chances with those men!"

George would have rather they had held their tongues, for he did not want to frighten the Indians.

This seemed to have occurred already. He, however, passed boldly around the fire, fully expecting to see the Indians crouching behind; but they were not there, nor could he see them anywhere in the long room.

"Hello! They've skipped out!" shouted George. "Come on, Harry! Come on, Edna! You can come, too, Fitzy—it's perfectly safe."

All hands now hurried up, and the next minutes were spent in hunting for the two old Indians all over the House of Skulls, but no trace of them could be found.

This seemed very strange.

As already explained, the house was fully a hundred and

fifty feet long, and if the Indians had run on beyond the fire it would have been impossible not to have seen them, and yet both Edna and Harry declared that they had not seen them after they dropped down behind the fire, and the Honorable Fitz was equally sure.

In the end they had to accept it as a mystery, and the boys set out to inspect their strange surroundings and to see what could be done toward making Edna and themselves comfortable for the rest of the night.

It was soon evident that they had been most fortunate in discovering the House of Skulls, which must now be more fully described.

It was built of rough logs, and had a steep roof, with a large smoke hole in the middle, which served to keep the air quite fresh. The only door was in front. There was none in the rear.

There was no attempt at inside finish either, and in the front there was no floor but the earth, nor any partitions.

It was here that the skulls were nailed up against the log walls, hundreds and hundreds of them.

There were big skulls and little skulls, skulls which from the remnants of long hair hanging to some of them looked as if they might have belonged to women. Of baby skulls there were many hundreds, and in one further section there was a great collection of the skulls of animals, bears, wolves, dogs, foxes, and some which the boys took to be the skulls of dolphins or blackfish.

There was one enormous skull of this description which Harry declared was the skull of a whale.

At the rear end there were no skulls, and the space against the walls of the house was divided off into little boxlike rooms by partitions made of upright poles bound together by some sort of vine.

These partitions were about ten feet high and the rooms were open in front. There was a big floor here, too; and as there were at least a hundred of these queer rooms, it seemed pretty certain that a great many persons must have occupied the house at one time.

Of course the boys looked into each one of these rooms in their efforts to find the two Indians, but without discovering the least trace of them; still, this led to another discovery of the highest importance in their present situation.

In one of the rooms was a great quantity of furs, buffalo robes, bear skins, deer skins and the skins of the fox, marten, mink, beaver and other small fur-bearing animals.

These skins had been all carefully dried, and the boys recognized their great value at a glance.

"Why, there's thousands of dollars worth of furs here!" cried Harry.

"We must count them up later," said Edna. "I must make notes of all this. It will make a splendid story for the Morning Call."

"I say!" cried the Hon. Fitz. "Am I in on the deal? Of course we shall carry these furs away with us when we go. I think I ought to have my share."

"There's one thing—they will make splendid beds!" cried George; "and I am going to take off my wet clothes and wrap myself up in one of the bear skins."

"Do, George!" said Edna. "It may save you from pneumonia. Harry, you and Fitz fix up the fire. I'll keep a lookout for the Indians and be ready for them in case they come."

No one knew until then that Edna carried a revolver.

She now produced a handsome Smith & Wesson and began patrolling up and down the House of Skulls.

Fitz was willing enough to work, and he and Harry soon had the fire blazing brightly.

A few moments later George appeared wrapped in a huge

grizzly bear skin and carrying his half frozen clothes in his hand. These he spread before the fire, and Fitz and Harry brought other skins and threw them down on the ground.

They made splendid sleeping rugs, and upon them the party passed the night.

George and Harry took turns in watching, but no alarm came. Edna slept pretty well once she got asleep, and as for the Hon. Fitz, he not only slept, but snored loudly.

Morning dawned clear and cool.

Leaving Edna and Fitz still asleep by the fire, George and Harry hurried out to have a look at things as soon as daylight began to appear.

The sea was rolling up on the beach, and now the tide was up the water extended within a hundred feet of the house.

Back in shore the land was high, and beyond, far to the east, a chain of lofty mountains, all covered with snow, was seen.

There was comparatively little snow between the beach and the house. The high wind of the night before seemed to have blown it all away.

"Well! Well! This is a great piece of business. To think that we should have been wrecked here!" exclaimed Harry. "What do you think of it all, George?"

"Well, for one thing I think there is no doubt about our being on an island," replied George. "For another, I think we are likely to stay here for some time, for we must be far out of the regular course of travel."

"By Jove! That's not a very pleasant prospect, old man."

"A good deal better than if we had fought our way into that boat."

"Oh, of course! That goes without saying. I'm not kicking, either, and I don't want you to think so. Only what are we to do for something to eat?"

"There's the Pacific Ocean, and there's plenty of fish in it."

"Yes; but a fellow can't live on fish forever."

"Oh, something else will turn up. There's the woods behind the house. We shall be able to shoot something there. I'm not going to worry."

"Speaking of the house, what a queer place it is, George. If a fellow was any way superstitious he would not care to be there long."

"Do you know," said George, "that I'm surprised Fitzy didn't kick about it."

"Never said a word, did he? Say, he may turn out to be a decent sort fellow after all. What do you think of the house, anyway? I never knew that Indians built houses like that."

"If you had read up the early history of this country you would have known it then. That's what called an Indian "Long House, or Trival House. In old time there were lots of them scattered along this coast, and then whole tribes lived under one roof."

"But how about the skulls?"

"Well, I have my own idea about those. Don't know whether I'm correct or not, though."

"What is it?"

"Why, all these Indians on the Pacific coast are divided up into big families or totems as they are called. These are named after animals and birds and fishes and other things. For instance, there is the totem of the bear, of the wolf, of the whale, or the crow, or any other old thing, and I have no doubt that the family who once occupied that Long House belonged to the totem of the head, or the skull."

"Sounds reasonable. The house does not look as though it had been occupied in a good while, though."

"Don't believe it has; yet the fact that we saw those two Indians by the fire shows that it has not been abandoned altogether. Say, it's a splendid chance for a bath. Let's get that place Blizzard Bay, I suppose. But where is Mr. Fitzgerald? Did you leave him on the steamer?"

This seemed to be just about the proper scheme, and the boys were soon swimming around in the little bay.

George was a splendid long-distance swimmer; in fact had quite a record in a modest way, and the temptation to exercise his powers now was too much for him.

He soon distanced Harry and struck out boldly for the bluff which marked the entrance to the bay.

Harry shouted to him to come back, but George only waved his hand in answer.

In a few moments he had passed around the bluff out of sight.

Harry turned back, feeling somewhat troubled. Before he could reach the beach he heard George's voice shouting:

"Hello, Hal! Hello! A big discovery! Put on your clothes and fetch mine! Come out on the bluff, old man!"

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT THE INDIANS WHO VANISHED IN THE HOUSE OF SKULLS.

Harry lost no time in obeying. He could not imagine what George had found, but he knew that it must be something important by the way he spoke.

He accordingly hurried on his clothes, and taking George's, which were now dry, ran along the beach and climbed the bluff.

As soon as he got on top he knew what George's excitement was about.

There lay the wreck of the Sea Lion in shallow water at the head of a larger bay.

The steamer was all listed over to one side, and looked to be in bad shape.

George was dancing about on the deck, and he waved his hand to Harry as he came in view.

"All right now, Hal!" he shouted. "We have got all the ship's stores to draw from. No danger of our going hungry, or dry either. Come out here and fetch my clothes."

This necessitated Harry taking off his shoes and stockings again. Rolling up his trousers, he waded through the shallow water to the wreck and joined George on the deck of the steamer.

"It's a big find," declared George, as he began dressing. "Not only does it serve our present purpose, but there ought to be salvage money, if the steamer can be got off."

"Do you think that is possible?"

"Well, I'm no judge; but I know I'm hungry, and when I go back to the House of Skulls I propose to go loaded down with grub."

After the boys were dressed they ran all over the steamer.

There was but a small cargo on board; three thousand cases of salmon formed the bulk of it, besides which were several bales of seal skins and other furs.

But the steward's pantry was well stocked with provisions, and on the salmon alone the party could support life for a long time. So that all fears on that score were at an end.

The boys got two big baskets out of the steward's room and loaded them with a good supply of eatables and then returned to the House of Skulls.

As they drew near Edna came hurrying out to meet them, and George lost no time in telling her the good news.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Edna. "So the blizzard blew the Sea Lion into the bay, did it. Well, we shall have to name that place Blizzard Bay, I suppose. But where is Mr. Fitzgerald? Did you leave him on the steamer?"

"Why, he wasn't with us," replied Harry. "We left him asleep on the bear skin beside the fire."

"He was not there when I woke up," replied Edna. "Probably he has gone into the woods."

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," said Harry. "Let's have breakfast. I've got coffee here and a coffee pot and two loaves of bread and a lot of butter and a leg of roast lamb, and George has got a whole lot of other things."

"I'm with you, there," laughed Edna. "I don't think I ever wanted my breakfast so badly in my life."

"Shall we go into the house to eat it?" asked George.

"Indeed we won't!" declared Edna. "The very sight of all those skulls makes me sick. Let's sit right down on the rocks here by the beach and have a regular picnic. One thing I'm glad of, my valise is on the steamer, and now I shall have a change of clothes."

"Yes; and we've got a trunk there somewhere and a whole lot of mining tools," replied George.

"How did you get the mining tools?" asked Edna. "I thought you went up to Alaska on salmon business?"

"So we did. This was a consignment of mining tools that our people sent to Juneau to the firm of Bennett & Burns. They failed about six months ago. My orders were to sell the tools if I could get a fair price for them, and to bring them back if I couldn't. Nobody would give half their value, so back they came."

"A piece of folly," said Edna, in her sprightly way. "Just wait till the Klondike mines become better known, and then you will see shiploads of mining tools sent to Alaska."

How true this prediction proved everybody knows now, but at the time of which we write there was but little belief in the Klondike mines.

It was real fun having breakfast on the rocks. The boys built a fire and made coffee and a tablecloth was spread over a big flat stone and breakfast served.

The Hon. Fitz did not put in an appearance, however, and George began to feel decidedly worried about him.

"I'm afraid something has happened," he said again and again. "That fellow is altogether too big a coward to go up into those woods alone."

"Perhaps we had better start out to look for him," said Edna.

"That's just what I think. As soon as I am through breakfast I am going to do it, too."

"I haven't the least doubt that he would give us the shake if he could," declared Harry. "If anything had happened in the Long House Edna would have known."

"It would seem so," added Edna; "and certainly nothing disturbed my sleep, but—oh, look there! Up at the house! There he is now!"

It was certainly the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald.

He stood in the open doorway of the House of Skulls looking down at the boys, but never spoke a word.

"Fitz! Fitz! Come down and get some breakfast!" shouted George.

Fitz seemed inclined to accept the invitation, for he started out of the house on the run.

Then a very singular thing happened.

Before the young man had advanced a dozen yards he suddenly halted and tumbled over backward, his legs at the same time flying up in the air and his feet kicking violently.

Then while in that position the Hon. Fitz went skimming over the ground on his back and shot head foremost through the door and was gone.

"My!" cried Edna. "What is the meaning of that?"

"Indians! He was lassoed!" shouted Harry.

"That's it! I saw the lasso come down over his head!" echoed George. "There they are! There they are!"

Sure enough there were half a dozen Indians crowding in the doorway of the Long House, peering out.

"It's all up with Fitz unless we help him!" cried George. "His skull is booked to go up on the walls like the rest."

"You've got your revolvers—what are you waiting for, boys?" cried Edna.

"You must stay behind," said George. "It's on your account that we are holding back. You must not go up there."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Edna. "As though I hadn't got my revolver! Just as though I wasn't as good a man as either one of you! Come on!"

All three started on the run.

Just what the boys had feared had happened, and, determined that Edna should not expose herself, George and Harry shot ahead and gained the door somewhat in advance of the plucky girl.

Meanwhile the Indians drew back inside and vanished.

"Look out, George! We'll get a shot, first thing you know," said Harry, warningly.

But the warning proved to be entirely unnecessary. There was no sound inside the queer building.

George hesitated an instant and then ran in.

"Why, there isn't any one here!" he exclaimed.

This was rather a hasty decision since there were a hundred places to hide in the long room.

But the examination which followed proved that George was quite correct. The Indians had completely vanished from the House of Skulls.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CANOE THAT CAME INTO THE BAY.

Here was a mystery which none of the little party could fathom, but it put a very serious aspect upon the disappearance of the Hon. Fitz.

Twice over they searched the Long House, but always with the same result.

"There must be some secret way of getting in and out of here," declared George. "One thing is certain, we mustn't put in another night in the House of Skulls."

"What's the matter with those tents?" said Harry. "We might set up a couple of them at the head of Blizzard Bay."

Edna inquired what he meant, and Harry explained that among the mining tools were a dozen or more tents, all ready for use, and only requiring to be put in place.

After some further discussion about the mystery all three went over the hills and down upon the shore of Blizzard Bay.

"We'll fix up the tents and get such provisions as we need ashore," said George, "and then we'll get back to the other bay and watch from behind the rocks for a while. We may see something more of the Indians. They can't have vanished into thin air and taken Fitz with them—that is sure."

Once more the boys did the wading act and made several trips between the wreck of the Sea Lion and the head of Blizzard Bay.

Each time they came back loaded with various things which seemed likely to be useful to them in the present emergency.

The tents were brought off first, and then Harry brought over a mattress and a supply of blankets.

Later it was Edna's grip, and later still the trunk which the boys used in common.

On the last trip George brought off a pick and spade and a good axe.

"There!" he exclaimed as he walked out of the shallow water to the place where Edna stood. "I should think this ought to do for the present. After we have taken another look for Fitz we will see about getting more provisions off. Harry is bringing a load of bread and cold cooked meat now."

"Yes," called Harry from the water, "and I don't see what you wanted to bother with that pick and shovel for. It's about the last thing we are likely to need, under the circumstances."

"Why, I don't agree with you at all," declared Edna. "When we set up the tents don't we want to dig a little drain around them? That's the way they do it in the Klondike. If you don't and it comes up to rain we will be deluged. Here, I'll show you how it is done."

Full of energy, as usual, Edna seized the spade and making out the line of her drain on the beach sand began to dig.

She threw up a few shovelsful of the sand and then the spade struck against something hard.

"Bother! There's a stone! I suppose I've turned over the edge of my spade!" cried Edna. "No, I haven't, either. Hello! What's this?"

She stooped down and pulled out of the sand a coarse, reddish-yellow looking mass, being irregular in shape, and held it up for George and Harry to look at.

"A nugget!" cried George. "A nugget of gold, as sure as you live!"

"Look out there! Look out there!" shouted Harry in the same breath.

He pointed out upon Blizzard Bay and George and Edna saw a long canoe with a high prow carved into the shape of a hideous head come shooting around the end of the bluff.

It was filled with Indians; there were at least twenty of them, all paddling vigorously.

"Better hide while there is time, I guess. What a shame! Just as you made that big discovery. What do you suppose that nugget is worth?"

"Why, from what I saw in the Klondike country, I would say it was worth at least \$10,000," replied Edna. "There! They see us! No, they don't, either; or, if they do, they are not paying any attention to us. They are turning the canoe toward the wreck."

"We had better get down behind these rocks," said George. "We can't do anything against them, so the best thing is to keep out of the way."

They crouched down behind the rocks and waited; but things did not turn out exactly as they expected.

When the big canoe had almost reached the wreck the tall Indian who stood in the bow, and who seemed to be the leader, suddenly uttered a wild shout and waved his hand in the direction of the shore.

"Hello!" cried Harry. "They have changed their minds—they are coming this way!"

It was a fact.

For whatever unknown reason that might have caused the change, the big canoe suddenly altered its course and made a bee line for the beach.

All saw that to remain where they were would be little short of madness.

"We must run for it or fight for it, one of the two," exclaimed George.

"We'll run first and fight afterward!" declared Edna.

They sprang up and started back up the beach on the run.

A fearful yell went up from the long canoe then, and a shower of arrows flew after Edna and the boys.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEA! THE SEA! THE EVERLASTING SEA!

"Are we going to run away and abandon all our things, like a trio of cowards, Hal, or do we make a stand against them?" exclaimed George Brandon when they had run a short distance up the beach.

"That's what I say!" Edna spoke up. "We want those things—they are absolutely necessary to us."

"Twenty against three is big odds," replied Harry. "Still, I'll do anything you say."

The trouble was Edna would not leave them, and the boys were afraid for her sake.

It was no use talking to the brave girl, either. Edna wanted to do her share of roughing it like a man.

"We will stop here behind these rocks and give them a round anyhow," she declared.

"Look out! Here come the arrows again!" exclaimed George.

They had just time to drop down behind the rocks when a shower of arrows came whistling over their heads, doing no damage, but showing clearly the unfriendly spirit of the savages.

George looked for serious trouble.

He felt that some show of resistance ought to be made at the start, just to let the Indians understand that they could not have everything their own way. So he threw up the rifle and fired three shots.

A chorus of horrible yells broke from the Indians and another shower of arrows was the result.

What the final result of it all might have been it is hard to say, for at that moment an unforeseen occurrence altered the whole affair.

The wind had been steadily rising for some little time, and as the tide was on the rise also and the wind blowing off the water, the rollers on the beach were getting bigger and bigger all the time.

All at once Edna spied a huge one sweeping into the bay. "Look! Look!" she cried. "It will swamp them sure!" And that is just what it did.

On came the wave, a perfect wall of water.

George declared afterward that there must have been a slight earthquake, and that this was the accompanying tidal wave; but, be that as it may, the canoe was thrown high in the air when the wave struck it and immediately swamped.

The wave broke upon the beach with a noise like thunder, the water running almost up to the rocks behind which our little party lay concealed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry. "They'll all be drowned!" For a moment or two it looked very much that way.

But the Indians all proved themselves splendid swimmers.

One after another came bobbing up to the surface and the canoe was speedily righted.

The accident seemed to have aroused the superstitious fears of the Indians, for they all got back into the canoe as quickly as possible and hastily turned around and paddled off out of the bay and were seen no more.

It was an immense relief to know that they were gone.

The boys and Edna climbed to the top of the headland and could see them paddling away down the coast.

Not only were they gone, but it was evident that they did not mean to come back again.

For some time this seemed too good to be true, and the shipwrecked party from the Sea Lion remained watching them until the canoe had disappeared.

"They are going to give us a rest for a while, anyhow," said George. "We must improve the opportunity. First question is where are we going to sleep to-night? In the House of Skulls again?"

"I say no!" declared Edna, positively. "I've had quite enough of that dreary place. Let's build ourselves some sort of a shelter at the head of Blizzard Bay."

This was promptly agreed to.

The boys had come to admire Edna's way of doing business so thoroughly that they were ready to consent to anything she might ask.

It was not a difficult task, either.

Among the things brought ashore from the wreck of the Sea Lion were two stout axes.

George and Harry went into the woods back of the beach and cut down a number of small hemlocks. Then selecting a favorable site, they drove into the ground two crotched poles and laid a third across resting in the crotches. Against these they placed hemlock boughs on each side, leaving a space for the door.

It made a capital shelter from the wind, and to a certain extent from the rain.

"There's your house, Edna," declared George. "Now we will build a bigger one for Harry and myself."

By the time this was finished it was time for dinner, and Edna, who had lighted a fire on the beach, had it ready prepared.

As there were plenty of supplies to draw from, the dinner proved a very good one.

After it was over all hands strolled up to the House of Skulls to see if anything could be seen of Fitzgerald, but the gloomy long house was quite desolate and the mystery of his strange disappearance remained unsolved.

"Let's put in the afternoon digging on the beach there where we found the nugget," suggested Harry. "We may find more gold."

"Not to-day!" said Edna, decidedly. "I'm in for that to-morrow, but not to-day."

"I know what you are driving at," replied George. "You want to climb the mountain and see what sort of place we have struck--isn't that it?"

"That's just what it is," replied Edna. "We really ought to know whether it is an island or whether it is the mainland."

"There's no better way of finding out than to get up to that big rock up there," said George; "it's easy enough."

Preparations for the climb were soon made, and, George leading the way, the party struck in through the woods to the foot of the mountain, and after a good lot of hard climbing they reached the top.

It was not quite at the top of the mountain, but it was pretty near it and a fine view was to be had on three sides.

It was water in whichever direction they looked.

"I guess we are on an island all right," said George; "but we can't decide the question till we get to the top."

"Well, I'm not going to try for it," panted Edna, and she sat herself on the rocks. "I've had just as much of this climbing as I want, but I wish you boys would push ahead to the top and leave me."

"No," replied Harry, firmly; "we will not leave you down."

"You, Edna!" exclaimed Edna. "What harm is going to come to me? Go on, boys. I want to be left. I insist on it. I'll run away and leave you if you don't."

"Come on, Edna," said George. "Edna must have her way if the heavens fall!"

George saw that Edna was determined, dragged Harry away and they pushed on to the top of the mountain.

"It's an island!" gasped Harry, his breath all gone.

And so it was. On all sides the water stretched away from the rocky shores.

"The sea! The sea! The everlasting sea!" cried George. "We have got to make the best of it. Here we are, and until some steamer comes along and rescues us here we are likely to stay."

CHAPTER VIII.

PANNING.

The boys did not remain long on the mountain top, but before they started down to rejoin Edna, whom they could still see quietly on the rock, they discovered several things of interest.

First, on the other side of the mountain the descent was almost perpendicular, and, as it looked to them, entirely impassable.

Here the mountain ended in huge cliffs, against which the water came dashing with fearful force.

"We won't go down there," said Harry; "but look over this side, George. The House of Skulls is not located a bit as I thought it was. It is right on the edge of a precipice, don't you see?"

George looked down upon the mysterious building and at once perceived that Harry was right.

Behind the House of Skulls rocks rose. The boys had not climbed upon them, and now they could see that these rocks formed the edge of a precipice at least a hundred feet in depth reaching down to a long, narrow valley which stretched far back into the interior of the island.

Beyond the valley another hill or mountain rose. It was not nearly so high as the one they now stood upon, so they could look right over it, and beyond that again was the sea.

The boys now descended and rejoined Edna.

"Well, we are on an island!" exclaimed George as they came out upon the rock.

"I thought so," said Edna. "Look down there, boys. Plenty of chance for our friend Fitz to vanish. Of course there is some secret passage under the House of Skulls, and he has been down there into the valley there, no doubt about that."

"I guess so," replied George. "There has got to be some exploring done sooner or later."

"Now," said George, "there is no time to go digging till we have seen what we can toward Fitzgerald's secret. I don't like the man, I tell you, but it would do to leave him in the hands of a parcel of Indians."

"If he is still alive," said George.

"If he is still alive, of course. That's the idea and we want to know that, too."

The return to the headland was the next move.

It was easier work going down the mountain than coming up, and they were soon at the shelters again.

Nothing would suit Edna but they must go up to the House of Skulls and have a look down into the valley.

"It will be easy enough to climb those rocks," she said. "I expect to see a whole Indian camp down there in the valley."

They pushed through the thick growth of bushes which surrounded the long house on three sides and soon came out at the rocks.

George gave a shout of disgust.

"Say, Harry, we could never get up here," he exclaimed.

"Perhaps it's not so steep further along," suggested Edna. "We are not through with it yet."

But they might just as well have given it up then. The rocks were not over twenty feet high, but they rose in one perpendicular wall as smooth as glass.

"Oh, for a ladder, or a balloon, or an elevator!" exclaimed Edna. "We can't do a thing without one of them. Boys, we have got to give it up."

They had followed this strange natural wall for fully half a mile on the left, and here it turned and joined the mountain. There was absolutely no chance to get up on it at this end.

At the other it was even worse, for the rocks grew higher and ended in a precipitous point which stretched far out into the ocean. Thus they found themselves cut off on all sides.

"Wait till to-morrow, when the sea is not running so high, and I'll swim out and see if I can't get around that head," said George. "I'm sure I can do it, but I don't feel like trying it now."

"Settled!" replied Edna. "I'll not urge you any more, boys. We have done all we can here, so let's get back and study the gold question a little bit since there seems to be plenty of time."

Now this happened to be a question that George had studied before while in Alaska, for, although he had stuck pretty closely to his salmon business, he had still found time to look into placer mining.

It was a subject that interested him greatly, for at that time George had had a very serious notion of giving up business and going off to the Klondike.

All this Harry knew well enough, and when he explained it to Edna she at once declared that George was unanimously elected boss of the new mining camp on Blizzard Bay.

"Well, then, if that is the case, let's go to work systematically," said George. "Just as though we expected to remain here and do business forever. First thing is to wash the sand here. Harry, you take a couple of those big tin pans we brought from the steamer and we will see if we can get a color right here on the beach."

Taking one of the pans when Harry came back, George scraped up several table-handsful of sand, threw them in the pan and then filled it up with water and began shaking it vigorously.

"Is that what you call panning?" asked Edna.

"It's one way to pan," replied George. "It'll do a tenth one, I must admit; but still it may give us a color, and that's what we want."

He now began to pour the water slowly off. The lighter particles of sand he allowed to go with it.

If there was any gold present, being heavier than the sand, it was bound to settle in the bottom of the pan.

Harry and Edna watched the operation with close attention.

"There you go, George," said Harry.

"Sah!"

"I don't!"

"The light is in your eyes. Look crossways over the sand!"

"I see it!" cried Edna.

"Harry! See it!" cried Harry. "Half of gold is left in the pan, I tell you."

George washed the sand a second time, disposing of nearly all of it.

What was left was a small collection of fine yellow dust, weighing about an ounce.

It was not the coarse, flaky gold and small nuggets which are found in the Klondike country, but still it was gold, and the way George reasoned was that if one pan taken at random from the beach would yield an ounce, the chances were altogether in favor of a richer find below.

Edna and Harry now went to panning on their own account, and George tried another.

The result was much the same in all three pans.

It was nothing wonderful, but the gold certainly seemed to be very evenly distributed through the sand.

By the time the sun had set about a hundred dollars worth of dust had been collected, which was certainly a pretty good return for a few hours' work.

"I call off!" exclaimed Edna at last. "I've got to look after the supper, boys, and anyhow there has been enough done for the day. There's gold here wherever we have a mind to look for it. We know that now."

"Yes; and we shall know more about it to-morrow!" declared George. "We've made a big strike I have no doubt. If we ever do escape from this island and can claim the land here, it may make us all rich."

"It will make a splendid story for the Call anyhow," said Edna. "Just you wait till you see me work up a boom on Blizzard Bay."

Another visit was paid to the House of Skulls after supper, but nothing was found to be in any way changed.

About nine o'clock our little party settled down for the night.

It had been arranged that Edna should sleep the night through and the boys divide the watch between them, George taking first turn.

So Edna retired to her shelter, and, putting a branch up before the door, disappeared.

Harry just flung himself down upon a pile of hemlock boughs in the larger shelter and was soon fast asleep, leaving George to pace up and down the beach, rifle in hand, ready for any emergency that might come.

It was dull work, and nobody who has not tried it need blame George for soon getting tired of his lonely watch.

Each time he walked toward the hill which separated Blizzard Bay from the next cove, where they had landed, George went a little further, and after four or five times he determined to push on around the hill altogether and take a look at the House of Skulls, which, let it be understood, could not be seen from Blizzard Bay.

He had no sooner come in sight of the long house than he saw that the return of night had brought a change.

A bright light shone through the windows. Tongues of flame could be seen leaping up inside.

"There's some one there!" exclaimed George. "Now is the time to solve the mystery if I only dared to leave Harry and Edna alone."

He determined to wake Harry and ask him to stand guard while he went to investigate the condition of things in the long house, but when he tried this he found it was not such an easy task.

Harry was a tremendously heavy sleeper at all times. He was in a deep sleep now, and, although George shook him again and again, he could not even get a grunt out of him.

George went out of the shelter and looked off on the bay.

The moon was shining brightly and he could see a long way out to sea; but there was nothing to be seen of the Indians.

"I'll risk it," he thought, for his curiosity was fully aroused.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HEAD THAT CAME OUT OF THE FIRE.

While there was no such amount of gold in the pan as Harry's earnest mind led him to believe, there was still a good showing.

"I'll take no chances, but I must and will get a look inside that house."

He hurried around the hill and started up the rise on which stood the House of Skulles.

Not a sound reached his ears as he drew near except the crackling of the fire, which George knew must be on the ground in front of the big stone which he had named "the altar."

Peering in through the open door when he reached it, he saw that he was right. A number of logs had been heaped up in front of the stone and were blazing away at a great rate; but there was no one to be seen near it, and not a sound was to be heard inside the house except the crackling of the burning wood.

George, after a little hesitation, ventured in and had a good look around.

Surely there was no one in the House of Skulls but himself.

"I suppose I ought to go back," he thought; "but I'm going to hold on a minute anyhow. Somebody built that fire and—hello! What was that?"

A loud thump sounded near the big stone altar.

George's heart gave a thump, too. The pile of bearskins lay on the floor at no great distance away, and he hastily crawled under it, pulling a big bearskin over his head and shoulders.

"If anything happens to Harry and Edna, I'll never forgive myself," he thought. "I know I ought not to do it, but here I am and—hello! Here she comes!"

A queer grating sound was heard near the altar.

Breathlessly listening, George peered out from under the bearskin, his eyes growing big with amazement at what he saw.

Suddenly a head with two immense ears appeared behind the fire.

It was a hideous head, half man, half beast, with two great, staring eyes, looking directly at the pile of bearskins beneath which the boy lay concealed.

CHAPTER X.

STRANGE DOINGS IN THE HOUSE OF SKULLS.

George no sooner got a good square look at the strange head which had risen up behind the fire, than he knew what it all meant.

The Indians, on the northwest coast of America, from British Columbia to Alaska, are all pretty much alike in one particular. They love outlandish ceremonies, and make strange things in wood representing grotesque and hideous heads.

Others take the form of huge wooden masks with great pointed noses and huge staring eyes.

In this case these masks are further adorned by having the horns of cows or elk attached to them, and this was the case with the one George was looking at now.

The hideous vision behind the fire was simply an Indian with one of these masks over his face, and a pair of elk's horns on top.

George lay perfectly still and watched.

Something was going to happen he felt very sure.

It all seemed he could not get out of the House of Skulls without attracting attention to himself, so he lay perfectly still and watched for what was to come next.

The mask moved slowly right and left, the big eyes peering about in every direction.

Then suddenly an Indian dressed in a queer suit made of skins leaped up behind the fire, and, uttering a shrill whistle, began to execute a wild dance before the altar, whirling around and around in the most surprising fashion.

It made George dizzy to look at him. He wished he was out of the long house and back at his post again, but unless he wanted to expose himself it was too late to make a move now.

So he continued to watch the whirling figure behind the fire. There was a strange fascination about it. Somehow or other George could not take his eyes away.

Suddenly another figure appeared dancing with the first. They were as much alike as two peas.

Where the second figure came from George could not tell, for he did not see it come. First thing he knew there it was, and that was all.

The wild dance continued.

Round and round the figures whirled with fearful velocity. Then the same thing was repeated.

Suddenly there were three, all exactly alike—all dancing in the same wild fashion.

Then it was four, five, six, and so on, until at last twenty of these strangely masked forms were whirling about behind the fire.

George was witnessing a sight which probably no white man had ever seen before.

It was one of the ceremonial dances of these Indians, who for reasons best known to themselves chose to keep hidden.

But George did not at all appreciate the blessing thus bestowed upon him.

He fully expected to see the masked Indians make a rush for the skins any moment, and drag him out. He heartily wished himself back in camp again.

After continuing the dance for about fifteen or twenty minutes, the masked figures suddenly came to a dead halt.

Suddenly all threw up their hands and with one horrible yell each made a rush for the side of the building, and each seized a skull and tore it away from the wall.

George had labored under the delusion that the skulls were so firmly fastened to the walls that they could not be removed.

Those which he had examined certainly were, but these could not have been, for the Indians pulled them away without the least difficulty, and now began tossing them up in the air and catching them as they came down in the most expert manner, singing and shouting as this strange game of ball went on.

This continued for perhaps ten minutes. Then every Indian stamped fiercely on the floor of the hut and came to a halt.

The skulls were now piled against the wall, and one of the masks gave a shrill whistle.

Something new was going to happen, and George watched breathlessly to see what it was.

He had not long to wait.

In a moment the head of the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald came into view behind the fire.

It was Fitzy with a bandage over his eyes and his hands tied behind him.

One of the Indians bent down, and, seizing hold of his hand, pulled him up into full view, the others silently watching.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded Fitzy in a trembling voice. "Say, don't kill me. I—I'll work for you—I'll do whatever you say."

There was no answer.

Fitz began to grope his way about.

In whichever direction he moved, he ran against an Indian.

Suddenly one of the masks drew out a long stone knife and began flourishing it about in front of the face of the blindfolded man.

The time had come to make a move.

"They are going to kill Fitzy, and add his skull to the rest of the collection—that's what they are up to," thought George.

He grasped his rifle, and had just made up his mind to spring up and stand for the rescue of Fitzgerald, no matter at what cost, when the question was decided for him in a hurry.

Suddenly the Indian with the stone knife waved it three times in a circle about Fitzy's head, and every mask made a rush for the pile of furs, each seizing hold of the first skin he could lay hands on.

"I'm in for it now!" thought George, and so he was all in a moment, for one of the Indians pulled away the bearskin which covered him before he had time to get on his feet.

CHAPTER XI.

BIG NUGGET NO. 2.

Probably George Brandon would have seen his finish then if he had not been sptv.

He flung up his rifle and blazed away over the heads of the masked dancers, yelling at the top of his lungs all the while.

The effect was altogether surprising.

"The Indians never made the least attempt to lay hands on him, but flocked back to the fire and began to drop out of sight rapidly.

"Run, Fitz! Run straight ahead!" shouted George.

Fitz paddled toward the door.

Without attempting to change his position George continued to blaze away over the heads of the Indians.

They were rapidly disappearing.

In a moment they were all gone.

The fire had now died down a good deal.

It was getting rather dark in the House of Skulls.

From his position in the world, George could not exactly make out what became of the Indians.

They seemed to just sink down behind the fire and disappear.

As the last one vanished George ran forward, and, setting in front of the fire, tried to find out what it all meant.

It could be nothing, however.

The knife he seemed to feel solid and no break anywhere.

Perhaps if he had been more particular in his examination George might have made some discovery, but he was too anxious about Fitz, so he ran out of the hut, shouting:

"Fitz! Fitz! Hold up there, wherever you are! They're all gone!"

It was well that George gave Fitz the call when he did, for the Indian had sprang away toward the beach, and as he had not the faintest idea where he was going, he would have found himself in the water in a minute more.

He was up now, and in a moment the Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald was a free man once more.

He was terribly "rattled," though.

All he would say at first was: "Don't let them get me, George Brandon! Don't let them get me! Don't let them drag me down into that hole again!"

"I'll see you all right," replied George. "You'll find Fitzy, George, with me to camp. Never mind telling me about it. Wait till you have cooled down a bit."

He followed him quickly enough.

As they walked on toward Blizzard Bay George looked back toward the House of Skulls again and again, but not the first sign of an Indian could he see, but when he turned the end of the hill and looked toward the shelters, who should he see but Harry and Edna hurrying toward them.

"There he is!" cried Harry. "Fitzy, too, by gracious! Hooray! Say, George, where did you find him? Where on earth have you been?"

"Well, I'm fairly caught, I see," replied George. "I deserted my post and went up to the House of Skulls. Of course I deserve to be shot, but I've got Fitzy just the same."

"Yes, he saved my life," said the Hon. Herbert. "There's no doubt about that, and I'm most awfully obliged to you, George Brandon, but please, please don't call me Fitzy. Now, there's a good fellow! Don't."

They walked on, Edna explaining how she had suddenly waked up and come out to see how things were going. Not finding George, she had become alarmed, and aroused Harry, and both started off to look for him. When George came up with them they were on their way to the House of Skulls.

Of course the next thing in order was to find out what Fitzy had to tell.

His story was rather a disappointment, however.

It appeared that Fitz had been captured while asleep, as near as he could make out, for when he awoke he found himself a prisoner in a cave with his hands and feet tied. After a good deal of hard work he managed to break the bark ropes which held him down, and, prowling about in the dark, he found a bowl full of what he took to be water. He drank some of this, and immediately fell down and soon became unconscious.

"I was dead drunk in a minute," declared Fitz, "and upon my word I'm not over it yet. My head is all muddled. I never knew a thing from that moment till I found myself blindfolded and being led upstairs, and then George hollered and told me to run."

"What!" cried Harry. "Don't you remember coming to the door of the House of Skulls yesterday morning and calling to us? Don't you remember being lassoed there?"

Fitz positively declared that he remembered nothing at all about it, and he seemed so sincere and dull that George led him in to the shelter to sleep out, which he did with a vengeance, for it was noon next day before he awoke.

Meanwhile the boys and Harry had accomplished a lot.

George never went to sleep at all. He declared that he just couldn't sleep, and the remainder of the night was spent in front of the fire till his over the watch return of Fitz, and the work they proposed to do the next day.

First thing after breakfast all three went up to the House of Skulls and made a careful examination of the earth floor in front of the altar, but not a trace of a break was to be found.

George declared that if it had not been for Harry, he would have half inclined to think that what he had seen was all a dream, but there was Fitz sleeping away in the shelter when they returned.

"We'll solve the mystery yet," said Edna, "but let it drop now. We want to get to work on the hole."

The pick and shovel had been stored in the boat.

George marked out a space six feet by four at the head of the beach, choosing a spot that looked as likely as any other, and they went to work to run down a prospecting shaft a few feet to see what will be struck.

Edna took right hold and worked with the boys.

It was a hard task, but they did it, and Harry helped her not to.

Two buckets had been brought out from the steamer with the other things, and while Harry plied the pick, loosening

up the earth, George filled the buckets and passed them up to Edna, who emptied them and passed them back again. In this way the work proceeded rapidly, but by ten o'clock, although the boys managed to get the shaft down about four feet, there was no sign of color in the sand.

"I guess we will have to give it up here and strike in somewhere else," said George, discouraged. "There doesn't seem to be the slightest show."

"Who says there isn't?" shouted Harry at the same moment. "No show! Then what do you call this?"

He struck his pick deep into the earth and turned up a queer shaped, brownish yellow mass.

"Another nugget!" screamed Edna from the ground above. And so it was!

George made a dive for it, and held up a nugget twice as big as the one they had found on the beach.

"It weighs ten pounds if it weighs an ounce!" he exclaimed, "and it's almost solid gold!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE STONE THAT CAME OVER THE ROCKS.

The finding of big nugget No. 2 was only the forerunner of other finds.

Of course there was no further talk of abandoning the prospect hole.

On the contrary, work was pressed forward more vigorously than before.

Between ten and eleven two other finds were made. Both were nuggets, one was even larger than No. 2, but the other was a little smaller than No. 1.

After eleven and on to twelve nothing was discovered, although our boy miners worked very steadily.

Edna had given it up now and was busy preparing dinner. The shaft was down about six feet, and it was necessary to stoop down and reach for the bucket. This made hard work, and the boys insisted that she give it up. George positively refused to fill the bucket again unless she did.

After Edna went away George used both pick and shovel and Harry took his place on the ground and worked the bucket.

"How far down do you think we shall have to go to strike into the regular gold deposit?" he asked when George finally gave it up and climbed out of the hole.

"Oh, it is impossible to say," replied George. "In the Klondike country, as you very likely know, they have to go down from eighteen to twenty-two feet. It might be the same here, or it might be more or less. I'm sure I can't tell."

"Hadn't we better shake out a few pansful of this stuff and see how she runs?"

"We might, I suppose. Still if there is any gold in there it runs so fine that I don't believe we could save much of it by panning. No harm in trying, though."

They did try, but nothing especial came of it.

About half an ounce of very fine gold was left in the pan.

"The sand is rich. That would be considered more than a color," declared George. "If we could put this stuff through the amalgam process I don't doubt that it would pay."

Of course Harry wanted to know what the amalgam process was, and George explained that it consisted of treating the sand with quicksilver.

He was still talking about it when Edna came and called dinner, and the boys went down to the beach to wash up.

Edna had spread the cloth on a big flat rock which had served them for a table before, and they were just beginning to eat when Fitz walked out of the shelter looking very much dazed.

"Hello, Fitz!" called George. "How are you feeling? Come and have some dinner. You must be as hungry as a bear."

"I am hungry," replied Fitz. "I don't know that I was ever so hungry in all my life. May I—may I join you?"

"Why, of course! We expect you to join us," replied George, kindly. "Come and sit right down. You'll feel better after you get some grub into your stomach. Do you remember any more about that business than you did last night?"

"What business?" asked Fitz, seating himself and attacking the crackers and cheese and canned salmon ravenously.

And here was the beginning of another surprise.

To the astonishment of all Fitz remembered even less than the night before.

He had not the faintest idea how he came to go to sleep in the shelter. He could not remember what had taken place in the House of Skulls.

"It's no use. I just can't do it, boys," he declared. "I suppose it is all just as you say, but upon my word the last thing I recollect is drinking out of the bowl in the cave."

But in spite of his lapse of memory Fitz declared that he felt perfectly well; he was most curious to know all that had happened in the House of Skulls, and he would have gone on talking about it the remainder of the afternoon if Edna had not interfered.

"Come, come!" she exclaimed. "It is no use going over and over the same ground. I tell you what we'll do, boys; we'll quit mining for the afternoon, build a ladder and climb up on top of those rocks. I'm most curious to know what is to be seen on the other side."

"That suits me," said George. "We'll do it."

"What's this about mining? Is there a mine here?" Fitz asked.

This gave the boys another job of explaining. Fitz inspected the nugget and grew enthusiastic. He wanted to know all about it, and the boys left him examining the shaft when they went up into the woods to begin on the ladder.

It took about an hour to build it. Hammers and nails had been brought off from the Sea Lion, and, with the axe, nothing else was needed.

When completed the ladder was strong if not artistic, and with it the whole party started for the House of Skulls.

Here everything was just the same. It was hard to believe that the silence of the dreary place had ever been disturbed.

Carrying the ladder around behind it, George and Harry placed it against the rock. George climbed up, and, grasping the edge of the rock, pulled himself up.

A startled exclamation escaped him.

"What is it? What do you see?" cried Edna.

Harry was already climbing the ladder, when all at once before George had time to reply a stone came whizzing over the wall.

It struck George squarely on the head.

With a sharp cry of pain, he pitched forward and disappeared over the edge of the rocks.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW HARRY JUMPED OVER THE CLIFF.

Evidently George Brandon had managed to get himself into serious trouble by the simple act of ascending the ladder and looking over the rocks.

"To the rescue!" cried Edna. "All this is going to make a first-rate story, but we don't want to lose George! Get up there, Harry! Get up on the wall!"

Harry was doing his best.

Truth told he felt mighty ticklish about it, too.

Gaining the top of the wall, he could see far down into the valley below.

He was able now to look right into the Indian village.

It was a big one and there were many people running about here and there.

None of them seemed to be looking up or paying the least attention to what was going on at the top of the precipice which ended in the wall of rocks where Harry stood.

"See George?" Edna called out.

"No, I don't! He has fallen down here and there is no help for him. Oh, what shall we do?"

"We won't give up till we have to, that's one sure thing," said Edna, very decidedly.

She started up on the wall, leaving Fitz at the foot of the ladder, staring stupidly.

"I've had my share of it and I don't want another," he called out. "I'm going to stay here."

"Coward!" cried Edna. "George saved you from their clutches, and now you wouldn't raise a finger to help him."

"Oh, now come, if you are going to talk to me that way, I won't stay here at all!" cried Fitz, highly offended, and he actually walked off without even inspiring it! Harry had seen another of George in the other side of the wall.

But, as we have said, Harry could see nothing of his friend. The precipice was not very steep—certainly not perpendicular, but it looked entirely too steep to climb down.

"It's a terrible thing," said Edna. "George must have gone to the bottom, and I can't believe he has."

"Nor I," replied Harry, briefly, letting his eyes roam in every direction over the side of the cliff.

"There a crowd of Indians there is down there," continued Edna. "They don't seem to be paying the least attention to us. They would if they had seen him fall."

"Yes, and how about the stone?" replied Harry. "Could they throw it up here? Never! It is more of the mystery of this place. George never went down that hill."

It seemed the merest folly to make this assertion, yet something seemed to tell Harry that he was right.

Suddenly the Indians in the village at the bottom of the valley caught sight of them and a wild shout went up.

The bucks were looking up, the children pointing. Women came running out of the lodges and the attention of every one was turned toward the two figures standing there on the rocks a good three hundred feet above the village.

"We can't stay here!" cried Harry. "Look, Edna! look! They are going to shoot us!"

Four bows and arrows were drawn then and a shower of arrows came flying up at the top of the precipice.

Harry saw at once that they were running no risk in regarding where they were. There was quite a wind blowing and the arrows were felled from their course long before they reached the top of the precipice.

Still there seemed to be no one in trying where they were, and Harry told Edna to get back down the ladder.

"We can't do any good here," he said. "Let's go back and get time to think."

They hurried down the ladder and stood looking at each other in silence.

"What are you going to do?" asked Edna. "If you don't make some move, Harry, I will."

"I was thinking about a rock," replied Harry. "It may seem a crazy scheme to you, but if I fall down there in front

of those rocks a few feet I believe I could find out something about George."

"Just what I was thinking myself. The rocks project so much a little way down there that we can't get a good view. I believe George was caught by somebody, and that that somebody is the one who threw the stone."

"We'll try it anyway. Where's that fellow Fitz?"

"Gone off mad."

"The fool! Let him go! I shall have to go to camp after the rope myself, I suppose."

"No. I'll go, Harry," said Edna. "Get up there again and lie down. Keep a watch! You may find out something. I won't be gone a minute longer than I can help."

Edna started off on the run and Harry climbed the ladder once more.

He had scarcely set foot on the wall when a stone came flying past his head.

Harry saw it coming and dodged.

"Ah, you wretched! I see you!" he cried. "Here goes; it's hit or miss!"

Then Harry did as brave a deed as was ever performed by any boy.

Edna had alighted under the wall in the brief moment of his absence.

Directly beneath him not ten feet down was now a larger platform made of fir tree trunks, upon which stood an old Indian with a hideously ugly face looking up at the boy.

It was he who had thrown the stone, and he was just about to throw another when Harry jumped down upon him.

He landed right alongside the Indian, who instantly made a rush at him.

But Harry was too quick for the fellow.

Reeling off, he dealt him a stinging blow between the eyes, sending the old man reeling back into a cave which opened in under the rocks.

He didn't give Harry a chance to repeat the blow. With a sharp cry he took to his heels and ran back into the cave, nearly stamping over George, who lay there motionless upon the ground.

CHAPTER XIV.

COLD GOES BOOMING IN BLIZZARD BAY.

"Let him go, Hal! Let him go! Don't try to follow!" George called out as Harry rushed into the cave.

There was a battle on his forehead and his legs and arms were tied with strips of walrus hide, but there was nothing worse to report than a battle when Harry whipped out his knife and cut George free.

"Are there any more of them?" Harry asked. "Oh, George, this is a big relief! I thought you were a goner, sure."

"Why, look here," replied George; "it's a wonder that I'm not. Would have been too if it wasn't for this—this—this trivance here."

George referred to the platform, which was a flat affair, supported by two fir trunks, one on either side, running in grooves cut in the rock.

It could be pushed out beyond the line of the cliff, and just a dash or two back again. The base of it was so narrow as to enable the Indian and his friends to reach the cave from the top of the rocks.

"It was a close call," said Harry, when he got his breath.

"I mean I thought you were a goner."

"Thought so myself," replied George. "When I got that

stone on the head it knocked me silly, and the next thing I knew that old fellow was on top of me. You put a scare into him, though. He don't seem in a hurry to come back. Where is Edna? How are we going to get out of here? First thing we know there will be a gang of Indians up out of that hole. I wonder you saw what there is down there?"

"I guess I've seen everything," said Harry. "Edna has gone after a rope, but I think we can get up without it. Hold on a second till I see if that fellow is laying for us. I don't want to get a stone on the back of the head."

He ran back into the cave, George following him.

They could see nobody. After a dozen feet or so the opening under the rocks seemed to narrow down to a mere slit, just about wide enough for a man to pass through, and to descend abruptly.

"No use going any further," said Harry. "Let's get back."

They returned to the movable platform. Harry, by climbing upon George's shoulders, was able to grasp the top of the ledge and pull himself up, and then, lying flat and reaching down, he caught both of George's hands and with a last effort drew him up on top of the rocks.

It was all over now and no harm done, except the slight cut on George's head.

They descended the ladder and hurried toward Blizzard Bay, neither Edna just beyond the House of Skulls.

"Well, don't you go and do anything like that again, George Brandon," she said, after she had heard the story. "Now I want to make a rule, and it must be obeyed. As long as these Indians don't interfere with us we must not interfere with them. Let's stick to Blizzard Bay and our mining and give the House of Skulls a wide berth."

It had come to be that Elra's will was law in the little camp on Blizzard Bay, and during the two weeks which followed this last adventure at the House of Skulls this rule was strictly carried out.

It worked well, too.

Nothing whatever was seen or heard of the Indians.

It looked as if they were content to leave the inhabitants of Blizzard Bay alone so long as they kept away from the House of Skulls.

But they knew that their enemies were near them.

On several nights lights were seen in the long house, and twice the strains of wild music were heard there, lasting from midnight until away long toward morning, but never a sign of an Indian was seen.

Meanwhile mining began.

A big day's work had been made on Blizzard Bay.

The shaft was run down twenty-three feet by the end of the week.

Fitz did his share of the work so grudgingly and was so terribly lazy about it that at last the boys decided to avail themselves of his services any longer, and Edna took his place when she could spare the time from the cooking.

At night Fitz turned hunter and gatherer, and with a bad shotgun taken from the steamer sauntered about the mountain and along the shore, almost always bringing back something of some sort.

There were always goats, and occasionally a wild goat, too. It was deer, and once Fitz came into camp triumphantly dragging after him a small bear, on which they feasted for two days.

The next morning he put up only a day of rest so far as possible, the latter was necessary.

In the afternoon all hands climbed the mountain and had a wild hunt.

At night the Indian village every hill seemed to be packed as full.

Far in the distance George spied the black smoke of a steamer, and he ran up a red silk handkerchief on the end of a pole and kept it waving for some time. It is doubtful if the signal was ever seen, but at all events the steamer passed out of sight.

Monday morning bright and early work on the shaft began again, and this proved to be the red letter day, for in less than an hour George struck into a mass of small nuggets closely packed together in true Klondike style, and all that day and the next and the next still the boys worked like beavers getting them out.

There was a good deal of sand mixed with them, and it required careful panning to make the separation perfect.

Sunday came again and the strike had been all harvested.

Now there was not much more than a color to be obtained in the bottom of the shaft.

Had it paid?

Well, just listen!

George found a pocket full in the valley of the Big Lion and every ounce of the gold had been carefully weighed out.

Here is the result: \$85,543 to the credit of the boy miners of Blizzard Bay.

CHAPTER XV.

FITZ SHOWS HIS TRUE COLOR AT LAST.

"It's going to rain," remarked Fitz when he came out of the shelter on Monday morning, something after nine o'clock.

"Well, what about it?" said George, who was busy clearing away the dirt at the dump around the mouth of the shaft.

"I shan't be able to bag any game to-day, dear boy. Of course I don't run the risk of getting wet."

"Certainly not. You might take cold. I'll tell you what you can do, though, just for a change."

"No; I don't want to," said Fitz, turning away.

"Of course not," said Edna, coming along with a pail on her way to get water from the spring. "Fitz would rather take a wetter at any time than to pitch in and do his share of work."

"Oh, come now, you're wear hard on me, Elra," drawled the drifter. "I'm willing to work, only George won't let me."

"I don't want to be bothered with you," said George, who had taken the pail from Edna's hand. "Get this full, so that I can keep on here."

"Why, certainly I will," said Fitz, dashed into the bay for a dip. "You don't have to tell me, George Brandon. I was just going to do it anyhow."

"Really with the bucket?" called Harry from down in the shaft.

"What you struck?" shouted George.

"There's a lot of gold is here in the side of the shaft. Seems to be a kind of spur of what we were working in last week."

"Good enough! Let's have a sample of them. If we can duplicate our strike of last week it will make us all rich."

"All right! I believe we can do it. Do we get the bucket or don't we? By thunder, you will be astonished at what I have got to put in it this time, George."

"Coming! Coming!" said George, who was standing over the fire, which had been kindled at the side with sticks which were always piled near the shaft.

"It's larger than my hand is, then," said Edna. "The pot

has got to boil, nuggets or no nuggets. Where is that lazy Fitz?"

Edna was not one of the kind to stand waiting, so she started for the spring around on the other side of a ledge of rocks which projected out into the bay.

"Strange what kinked this rope so," exclaimed George. "I'm sure I left it all straight last night. It's almost enough to make one believe that some one has been fooling with it."

"Do you think so?" replied Harry, from the bottom of the shaft. "Do you know that I'm dead sure that some one has been fooling around down here since we quit work Saturday night?"

"No!"

"Well, now, I am. There has been digging done on this side, and I'll bet on it. I didn't like to say a word before, because—"

"Because I was on guard the first half of the night," broke in George. "Well, I'll have to make a confession. I suppose I did fall asleep."

"I thought so," said Harry. "There has been somebody here. This is serious. Have you looked to see if the boodle is all right?"

Now the "boodle" as the boys jokingly called the gold they had dug, which already amounted to the large sum of nearly a hundred thousand dollars, had been carefully buried each evening in a hole dug for the purpose lying between the shelter occupied by Edna and the one in which Harry and George slept.

"I haven't looked, but I will," replied George. "Here goes the bucket, Hal!"

"Let her come! Take a look at the treasury just for form's sake and see if everything is all right."

Harry received the bucket and began to fill it, and was still at work when all at once he saw George looking down at him as pale as death.

"Hal," he said, quietly, "there's trouble."

"What? Not gone?"

"Every ounce of it, and all my fault. Great heavens! what can I say? What shall I do?"

Before Harry had time to answer a piercing scream rang out down in the direction of the spring.

"Edna! More trouble!" cried George, and Harry sprang to the ladder and was out of the hole in an instant.

"What's up? What was that?" he called, running after George, who had already seized his rifle and was darting off in the direction of the shore.

"It's Edna! Come on!" he shouted. "Oh, Hal! There it goes again!"

"George! George! Save me!" came the cry, and the last of it seemed to be smothered, as though some one had clapped a hand over Edna's mouth.

In a few seconds Harry had overtaken George. In a moment more they went bounding around the rocks in full sight of Blizzard Bay.

Two boats filled with men were pulling away from the shore. In the first were Harry and Fitz.

The girl was evidently a prisoner, for two of the men held her and Edna was struggling all she knew.

Only one of them pulled her down into the boat, and at the same instant Fitz, who was sitting calmly in the stern, turned and shouted back to the boys:

"Tra-la-la, Georgie! Good-by, Hal! See you later, after I've dug up some more gold!"

"The traitor!" gasped Harry. "Oh, George, what does all this mean?"

Without a word, George flung up his rifle and fired straight at the boat.

"So, so!" shouted Fitz. "You will, will you? Let 'em have it, boys."

Without a word four of the men in the rear boat, rough-looking fellows all of them, swung around, threw up rifles and sent a regular fusillade shoreward.

The boys saw it coming and ducked just in time to save themselves, the bullets whistling over their heads.

By the time they recovered themselves the boats were well under way.

It was useless to fire, and George realized it.

"Fitz, you traitor! Look out for me!" he shouted. "My time will come yet!"

Fitz turned, and pulling off his hat waved it derisively as the boat shot around the point and was lost to view.

CHAPTER XVI.

HUNTING FOR EDNA.

It was a hard blow which had now struck our boy miners at Blizzard Bay, but a blow of another sort was already gathering seaward which threatened to add to their troubles; in other words, the most severe storm which had ever broken over desolate island was now close at hand.

The boys realized something of this even in the excitement which followed the disappearance of the boats, for the wind was already blowing strongly toward the shore, throwing up great whirls of spray with every wave that broke.

And these moments were moments of agony. To have lost the gold would have been bad enough, but to think of Edna in the hands of a gang of the toughs which are ever moving up and down the far northwest coast, ostensibly gold prospectors, but actually cut-throats, pirates or anything else in the criminal line that circumstances may call for, was terrible indeed.

So as George and Harry ran over the rocks trying to catch another view of the boat neither spoke a word, but the determined look on the faces of both might well have made the "Hon. Herbert Fitzgerald" fear for his own safety if he could have seen his companions of the wreck then.

At last the boys gained the end of the point which marked the entrance to Blizzard Bay on the left.

Here they had a full view of the ocean and here the boats certainly should have been visible if they had put out to sea.

"Not in sight, George," said Harry, after they had stood a few moments holding on to their hats and straining their eyes off toward the horizon.

"No."

"They have kept in shore. Probably they came off of some schooner or small steamer, which is hiding around here somewhere."

"You're right. I have no doubt that's so. Oh, Hal, what a terrible thing I have done! I ought to be shot or kicked off these cliffs into the sea."

"Hold on, now, don't distress yourself so much about it, old man," replied Harry, kindly. "I have my own ideas about the whole matter. I believe that fellow Fitz has played us for a couple of suckers from the first."

"So do I. He's a fake and a fraud. I'll bet he knows the Indians; I'm certain his story about being drugged in the House of Skulls was all a lie."

"My idea precisely," said Harry, "but I go further than that; I believe he drugged us all last night. It was he who made the coffee and we all drank it just before Edna and I

turned in. My head was as heavy as lead and when you came to call me after midnight it just did seem as if I could never wake."

"Do you really think so?" asked George, looking immensely relieved. As for me, I can't tell you how I came to fall asleep. I only know that I found myself lying on the ground near the shelter. Don't remember lying down even; was never more surprised in my life than when I found myself there."

Five minutes passed. Still the boys stood looking off on the sea.

"There's one thing, Edna is good for any of them," said George. "Tisn't as though she was one of your weak ones. What a story she will have to make out of all this for the Morning Call after—hello! I see something at last! Look there, Hal! Look there!"

"Smoke!"

"Yes."

"A steamer!"

"That's what I think. It's hiding in some bay or cove further along the shore."

"Of course it has been there for several days. Fitz's hunting expeditions were only a blind. He simply went to meet these fellows. They were waiting for us to get through with that strike and as soon as it was done they went for the gold."

"And now we will go for Fitz," said George, setting his teeth. "Don't know what we shall do when we strike that gang, but I bet you that infernal dude will wish he had never been born."

It was a relief to have something to do even if it was only following that thin thread of smoke which, far in the distance, could be seen, rising about the high projecting masses of rocks that everywhere lined the shore of the island.

It looked as though it was going to be an easy matter to cross over the rocks and reach the place, but the boys knew very well that it was not so.

They had made several trips along the shore. Nothing could be rougher. It was a series of high, rocky bluffs, with deep indentations between and little or no beach anywhere.

In order to make any progress you either had to walk back to the head of these indentations, or bays, or to climb down over the cliffs and cross through the water.

At low tide many of these crossings could be accomplished by wading and it was dead low water now, so every moment was precious if the boys expected to make any headway in their search.

Three of the bays were thus crossed; each time there was a difficult and dangerous climb down and up the cliff.

George stopped after the third crossing the smoke seemed to be so near that George declared that the next bay would probably show them the steamer.

"I hope so," replied Harry, rather dismally. "There's going to be more trouble, though, I'm afraid."

It was not necessary for George to ask him what he meant. The sky had now all clouded over and the gale had increased to such an extent that they could scarcely keep their feet.

As yet the rain had not come, but it seemed clear upon them and when it did come, unless all signs failed, it was to be a terrible storm.

The boys hurried on along the bluff for fully half a mile. The wind seemed to retreat before them and there was not even a break to be seen anywhere.

The wind had blown far beyond any point where they had been before, it was all new ground and there was no telling where they might strike.

"There you are," said George at last. "I see the end. The end is right at the bow."

"Then the steamer is in the next one," replied Harry. "It's fully half a mile away from us yet."

And Harry was quite right. When they reached the edge of the cliffs and looked down into the break they saw that they had struck a more serious obstacle than anything encountered yet.

It was a broad bay which lay below them. The strip of water was several hundred yards across; and seemed to be pretty deep. At the head of the bay was a white, sandy beach, upon which the waves were breaking with fearful force, and this was a mile distant at least.

George's heart sank, for he realized that it would take the best part of an hour to cross this bay and to come back on the other side to the point on the bluffs opposite to where they were now.

"Shall we swim it, Hal?" he asked. "It will take forever to go up to the head of the bay and back again."

"I'm good for it if you are. Anyhow the tide's running in and there isn't much danger of our being washed out to sea."

"Then we will try it, providing we can get down the rocks here."

It was a tough climb. Part of the way they simply had to sit down and slide.

George saw that they could never hope to get back again and he felt very doubtful if they were going to be able to climb up on the other side once they got across.

"Look out for yourself, Hal," he called, for Harry was ahead. "Can you see whether there is any beach there or not?"

"No, I can't. Can't get a view down there at all."

"We ought to know, though, before we go much further. Where in the world are you going to land unless—look out for yourself, Hal! Don't lean over so far!"

Too late came the warning.

Hal had already leaned too far over the ledge upon which he was standing.

He toppled forward and disappeared like lightning, striking the water below with a loud splash.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM ONE PERIL TO ANOTHER.

"Are you all right?" yelled George, terribly startled by this sudden mishap.

"Right as the mail!" came the answer. "Such a find down here, George! Look out for yourself or you will come down same way I did and you don't want that."

"What is it? What have you struck?" called George, as he climbed down over the rocks, not daring to lean over to find out where Harry was.

"A canoe! I've had my bath. No swimming needed here."

"Good enough. A war canoe as true as I'm a sinner. See any Indians around?"

"No, I don't. They can't be far away, though. Hurry up, George. This is our game. We can round the next point easy enough now."

George lost no time in getting down to the flat rock, against which the canoe lay fast and firmly, nose of a rock hidden under a sharp upright stone.

It was really a tremendous affair, being fully sixty feet long and four feet wide.

It seems to have been hollowed out of one enormous tree.

trunk and at the bow rose a great wooden post, carved all over with grotesque heads in the style common to the Indians of the Northwest coast.

"Jump in, George," cried Harry; "there are plenty of paddles here. The Indians must have gone back among the hills somewhere. It's a shame to rob them, but we've got to use the luck that comes to us. That's right. Mind how you step or you will turn the old thing over. Now, then, cast off. Confound it, what's become of the wind?"

It was a curious change which had suddenly come over the storm.

All at once the wind seemed to die away and then, before the boys had fairly seated themselves in the canoe and thrown out their paddles it shifted several points and came sweeping down through the deep canyon with a mighty rush which sent the canoe flying seaward with fearful velocity.

"A blizzard! A blizzard!" gasped George, for following on the wind came a whirl of snow in big flakes so thick that the boys were almost blinded.

All in a moment the whole atmosphere was full of it and they could see nothing three feet away from them. Such a thing as stopping the canoe was just as impossible as to try to fly. They could only go with it in whichever direction the wind chose to carry them along.

"We must try to land," yelled George. "We are lost if we get outside the bay in this blow."

"What's that you say? I can't hear you?" Harry yelled back.

Before George could try it again a wild cry, as if from many voices, was borne toward them from behind on the wind.

"The canoe! The canoe! Where's the canoe?"

"Adrift! She's gone adrift!"

"Then we are lost!"

"Here they come!"

"Look out!"

"Fire!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

All this was heard and then a horrible yelling and the crack of rifles rose above the storm.

But not a thing could be seen back in the direction of the sounds but the wild whirl of snowflakes getting thicker and thicker every instant.

The yells grew louder; the voices which had spoken could now only be heard in one cry. The cry and the crackling of the rifles continued until all at once the sounds ceased entirely and there was nothing to be heard but the rushing of the wind.

"What do you think it is, George?" said Harry, and the last words came to George's ears.

"It's Fitz and his gang fighting with the Indians!" yelled George; "that's my belief."

He had scarcely spoken when the last of the snow blew past them; the squall was over but the wind blew harder than before.

Looking back, the boys perceived that they had rounded the

point either on one side of the bay or the other without knowing it.

The canoe was skimming past high, beetling cliffs, which projected far over the water; in fact, were hanging directly over the canoe.

"Great Scott! Suppose some of those rocks should come tumbling down upon us!" exclaimed George.

It was almost like a prophecy, for the words were no mere than uttered when a noise like thunder was heard above them and a vast mass of the rock was seen to disengage itself from the ledge and come whirling down.

Wildly working at their paddles the boys made a violent effort to get out from under.

It was useless.

The rock struck the stern of the canoe, tearing it to splinters, and dropped into the water with a force which set up a whirl of spray twenty feet high, while the canoe itself instantly filled and sank out of sight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE MERCY OF A MADMAN.

It was a lucky thing for the boys that both were perfect experts in the water.

If it had been otherwise they would have seen their finish then.

George jumped when he felt the canoe going under.

Harry, half dazed by the suddenness of the accident, was not quick enough in disengaging himself from the wreck to avoid being pulled under, but he bobbed up serenely just the same and was as ready to face the new danger almost as soon as George.

We refer to the waves.

They were "mountains high," as the saying is, and the rising tide was sending them dashing against the cliffs with fearful force.

There was no chance to communicate with each other now; it was each one for himself and a big chance if either would ever escape this fearful peril.

Twice George was thrown back toward the cliff edge, but each time the wave broke a little short of the rocks.

He had lost sight of Harry from the first and gave him up for dead.

Springing out of the water at a moment when the retreating wave brought a lull, George could see that he was almost around the point and he made a desperate fight for it and got around altogether.

His strength was almost gone now and it is very likely he would have given up entirely if he had not all at once caught sight of a small, low, rakish little steamer riding at anchor in a narrow bay and not ten feet around the point.

"The steamer at last!" he thought. "Well, it's life or death with me. I've got to get aboard there or pass in my checks!"

It was a question if he could do it.

The steamer was straining her anchor chain fearfully, threatening to break away from her holding at any instant.

There was no one to be seen on deck, but steam was up and the thick, black smoke of the soft coal showed George that at last, under these most unfavorable circumstances, he had reached the goal which he and Harry had struggled so hard to obtain.

"I've got to get aboard there if they kill me!" he thought. "I'm almost winded. There is just nothing else to do."

Throwing all his remaining strength into one vast effort he struck out boldly, and, coming up under the steamer's bows, managed to clutch the anchor chain.

It parted almost instantly.

Instead of the rigid chain which he had so desperately grasped, George found himself holding on to the dangling end, while the steamer, freed from its moorings, was moving rapidly seaward, impelled by the rushing wind.

George was as good a climber as he was a swimmer, but he was so exhausted that it took a mighty effort to rouse himself to the effort, still any one watching the boy as he went over the side like a monkey would scarcely have imagined how he felt.

Once on the deck, his strength deserted him and he fell down panting like a winded water dog.

The steamer was well clear of the point by the time he got his breath.

He then scrambled up and stared around.

There was nobody in the pilot-house, no watch on deck, but he could hear a terrific yelling somewhere on board the strange craft.

It was like the cry of a demon. It made George's blood fairly run cold to listen.

"That's a madman!" he thought. "It must be. Nothing else could holler like that."

He hurried aft, drawing his revolver as he went; the rifle, of course, had gone down with the canoe.

He had scarcely advanced ten feet when, bounding up out of the cabin without a hat and all wet and dripping, came Harry.

"George!" he shouted. "Good heavens! Are you here? Look out! Look out! He's got a knife!"

Instantly the man came springing out of the companionway down after him.

He was a big, powerful fellow, dressed only in shirt and trousers; his black eyes gleamed wildly and his hair stood up all over his head.

"They are after me! They are after me!" he yelled, brandishing a long knife. "Where is the one who ran this way? I'll get him! Ah! There he is!"

He had no time to see George, but as his eyes met George's he made a rush for him with the knife uplifted.

"I'll get him!" yelled George, drawing himself up to meet Harry.

"Look! Get back!" he shouted. "Go below!"

He did not raise his revolver, however.

Somewhere he had read that any one suffering from delirium tremens and, indeed, mad people generally, could almost always be influenced by the positive command of a will stronger than their own, and, great as the risk seemed to be, he determined to try it now.

It worked like a charm.

The man stopped yelling, stared at George and suddenly wheeling about, made a dive back into the companionway and disappeared.

"Phew!" gasped Harry, "that fellow has got them bad! Oh, George, what a queer twist affairs have taken! How did you ever get aboard here?"

"Same to you," replied George. "I swam for it and climbed up the anchor chain. Is anybody else aboard but that man?"

"Don't know. I did the same thing you did. I started down into the cabin to see if I could find—hark! Edna's voice! Great heavens, he has attacked her!"

Piercing screams were heard below in the cabin.

Unmistakably it was Edna's voice calling for help.

"Fly, Hal! It's Edna! She is at the mercy of the madman!" cried George, and they made a rush for the cabin stairs.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON BOARD THE ROCKET.

With Edna calling for help, as may well be imagined, it did not take George and Harry more than a few seconds to get into the cabin.

The sight which met their gaze was enough to arouse them to the highest pitch of excitement.

There was Edna kneeling on the cabin floor, with the mad sailor holding her by the hair. He clutched a long knife in his hand, which he kept flourishing around her throat.

It was a thrilling moment. Realizing the man's condition, the boys did not dare to rush upon him and try to get possession of the knife, for fear that the mischief might be done all in an instant.

"Hello!" shouted George. "Hello, friend! The captain wants you on deck."

The man stopped his motions with the knife and turned to see who had spoken, for his back was toward the boys.

"Who are you?" he asked in a hoarse voice. "Are you a couple of devils come to fetch me? Say, you know you're not real. You know I could walk right through you if I tried."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed George. "Say, you're smart; you are onto us. Come and try it. You can kill the girl afterward. You know she can't escape."

"Don't laugh at me, you fiends!" yelled the sailor, turning his rage toward George now, just as our hero intended he should do.

He let go of Edna's hair and made a rush for them.

"Let him go between us, Hal," whispered George. "Let him go between us. Just like enough he'll chase up on deck."

It was a happy thought, for it worked like a charm and brought matters to a crisis at once.

As the madman came rushing toward them the boys suddenly parted.

"Fiends! Fiends!" he yelled, and up the cabin stairs he went flying.

George ran to Edna, who he thought was fainting; Harry started after the fellow up the stairs.

"George, help me up!" cried Edna. "I'm all right. One thing that fellow has done for me, he has set me free. Pretty sort of chap to be left to guard a prisoner, is he not? You won't in time to save my life. Up on deck with you. Go help Hal or heaven knows what the result may be."

Before George could gain the stairs a loud shout from Harry told him that matters had come to a head on deck.

"Come up, George. Bring Edna up!" shouted Harry. "He has thrown himself overboard and I guess he is drowned."

George and Edna got up on the deck without an instant's delay.

"There's where he went!" cried Harry, pointing to the starboard rail. "Just jumped right over and sank out of sight. Edna, are you hurt?"

"Not a bit," replied Edna. "I'm as sound in wind and limb as ever I was. Goodness, how it snows! Tell me all about it, boys, and then I'll tell you about myself and all about Fitzy, which will surprise you—goodness me, what a splendid story it will make for the Morning Call—and then I'll tell you a secret which will please you. On second thought I'd better tell the secret first, and here it is. I know where those infernal pirates have hidden the gold and you may thank the madman for that, for it was he who gave the secret away."

"Good!" cried George. "Our story is soon told, Edna. We came to look for you and we found you, that's all. We have been blown away by a blizzard, we tumbled over cliffs, we stole a canoe and got smashed up by rocks tumbling on us, and finally we got up on this boat and I'm coming along on board just now to tell you. That's about the whole thing in a nut-shell. Say, Hal, this boat is dragging her anchor; we are working out to sea."

There was no doubt about this being a fact. The boys soon proved it.

Slowly but surely the little steamer was working out into the bay.

"We can't do anything about it, though," said George. "Let her go for a little. We have got to keep watch. Later on we will see if we can't get steam up and make a move."

"As for my story," said Edna, "it is just as simple as yours. Fitzy and his crew are the pirates. They are based on this steamer. You see, it is the only boat here. But you were."

"I suspected it," said George. "The gold—"

"Was stolen to the last ounce," interrupted Edna, "but I suppose you know that all right. Who do you suppose Fitzy really is, boys? You would never guess. He told me himself. Do you know that impudent rascal actually wants me to marry him? The idea of such a thing! Well, who do you suppose he is?"

"The one I can't imagine him to be anything else but what he seems," replied George.

"He's the notorious Captain Crowninshield!"

"What! The seal skin pirate?"

"That's him. For the last two years he and his gang have been holding up the sealers and helping themselves to the results of their catch. He has been written up in the Call twice. You know the United States steamer Bear has been out after him again and again and the Canadian authorities even sent the Royal Canadian Police to the port of this steamer, boys—always managed to show her pursuers a clean pair of heels. Strange that we should fall in with him, isn't it? Of course this island is the regular hang-out of the gang. Fitz admitted it and he told me that he has been in communication with them from the first. They were only waiting for us to dig enough gold to satisfy them and then they jumped on us—that's all."

"And the story about the Indians capturing him in the House of Skulls was all a lie?"

"Every word of it. When we thought he was drugged he was simply drunk. Oh, he's a coffee cooler. You wouldn't know the man if you could see him as I saw him on the deck of this steamer, and that's right."

"We are almost out to sea," said Harry. "If the wind holds as it is it will take us back to Blizzard Bay, too."

"Yes, if it don't land us on the rocks," said Harry, "and that's what it's liable to do. I wish it would stop snowing; we might be able to do something then. Edna, where is the gold?"

"Come with me and I'll show it to you," replied Edna, and she led the way over to the after-cabin.

"Hoof it!" cried Harry, for the gold dust and nuggets were stacked up on the floor.

At the same instant the sharp report of several rifles was heard.

"What's that?" cried George. "What's that sound of?"

Again the rifles rang out and still again.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTURED BY THE INDIANS.

The boys and Edna hurried on deck to find that the situation had not changed.

The sky was now clear, although the wind was blowing harder than ever.

The steamer had drifted clear of the bay and was just passing the mouth of the cove where George and Harry had found the canoe.

The firing still continued; George and his companions hurried to the rail on the side toward the cove and there they saw two long canoes like the one they had taken lying off the rocks where they had seen the men.

The canoes were filled with Indians, who were firing at a number of white men who were trying to make their escape by running along the rocks, some of them every now and then turning back and firing rifles at the canoes.

"A fight!" cried George.

"And see! Fitz is leading the Indians!" Edna exclaimed. "It is a quarrel among the seal sk'n pirates. Fitz and half a dozen others have turned upon his own men."

It was more than a fight, as they presently became aware. Harry was the first to discover the true situation.

"They can't go much further!" he cried. "See! They are penned in. They can't get beyond that little point and they can't go back without running right into Fitz's crowd."

"Fitz and the Indians are going to land!" exclaimed Edna. "Look at him fire! Who would ever have supposed there was so much life in the man? Goodness, boys! This is going to be a regular massacre! I must make a sketch of it for the *Morning Call*."

Edna pulled out her notebook and pencil and went to work coolly as though it was all a most ordinary affair.

Then they saw Fitz lead the charge.

The canoe in which he sat was run ashore and the others immediately followed his example.

Fitz led the Indians in a bold dash upon the rocks and a fearful fight was on all in a moment.

The watchers on board the *Rocket* saw several men go leaping into the water, while the Indians seized hold of others and scalped them.

Several of Fitz's party were shot by the men on the rocks, who were still making a brave defence, although evidently getting the worst of it, when the steamer passed beyond the point and the whole scene vanished in an instant, although the firing and the wild shouts could still be heard.

"There!" exclaimed Edna, shutting up her notebook. "I've got a fine sketch of it all. Good gracious, boys, I shall have to get up to keep me going for weeks if I ever get back to town, and I'm not going to do it for a moment if that I shan't do just that very thing."

"We had better be thinking about getting back to Blizzard Bay first," said George.

"Why not put right out to sea?" asked Edna. "Here are three of us; one for the deck. I believe we could do it—I do, indeed."

"Well, there isn't one in the crowd who knows the first thing about managing a steamer," said George, "it is entirely a risk. Still it's a risk not to do it, and there you are."

"Take the wheel and see what you can do, George," said Indians.

Edna. "Steer for Blizzard Bay and then we will make up our mind."

"But we are dragging anchor."

"Can't we get the anchor up? At least we can try."

They did try, but met with no success, for the anchor was entirely too much for their united strength, or perhaps they did not know how to handle it.

While they were fussing over the anchor the steamer continued to drift on and was rapidly drawing near Blizzard Bay.

"I think I might turn her in," said George. "We might as well go there as anywhere else. If we can get the gold ashore and hide it before Fitz and his crowd come down on us that will be something accomplished. After that we will decide what to do next."

"I hate to give up the ship," said Edna. "It seems our only means of salvation. Let's go right out to sea, even with the anchor dragging. Harry, what do you say?"

"I say yes," replied Harry. "George, will you take the wheel or shall I?"

Before George could reply there was a shock which nearly threw them all off their feet and the steamer listed away over to the port side.

"On a rock, by thunder!" cried George. "That settles it. We won't ever get to Blizzard Bay."

They had got themselves into serious trouble in more ways than one, as they found out a few moments later.

The *Rocket* was hard and fast on the rocks and pounding terribly.

"There they come!" cried Edna. "We are in for it now!"

She pointed back in the direction of the headland which they had just passed.

There were the two big canoes filled with Indians being paddled rapidly toward the steamer.

"Let's get out on the rocks!" exclaimed George. "We can make the shore with nothing worse than wet feet."

"Alas for the gold!" sighed Edna, "but I suppose it has got to be done. Just hold on a second, boys, while I make a sketch of these canoes and then I am ready to go."

"Sketch nothing!" cried George. "If we are going we want to go now before they see us."

They hurried to the lower deck, where they had no difficulty in climbing out upon the ledges and by jumping from rock to rock they gained the shore.

"This way," said George. "We will pass around that point and that will keep Fitz from seeing us, while we are climbing up on the bluff."

It was just about the worst move they could have made. As they scrambled over the rocks toward the point a sharp whistle rang out from the direction of the canoes.

"Fitz sees us!" cried Edna.

"Look!" gasped George, stopping short. "That's not all!"

Harry gave an exclamation of dismay, for there, right ahead, standing motionless and covering them with rifles, were five Indians.

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted one, who seemed to be the leader. "Come on. No be frightened. Come on to the House of Skulls."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN BEHIND THE ROCK.

"Good gracious. We are in for it now!" cried Edna. "What in the world are we going to do?"

"Nothing at all. There's nothing to be done," replied George. "Look behind you, Edna. We have deliberately walked into a trap."

A dozen or more Indians were creeping up behind them over the rocks. Some were armed with rifles; all carried long knives in their belts.

To have attempted to show fight would have been simply useless and could only have resulted fatally.

"It's a case of unconditional surrender," Edna remarked in her cool way and she walked right up to the big buck who had done the talking and held out her hand.

"How are you, old man?" she exclaimed. "Come, shake and let's be friends. There is no use in quarrelling."

It was certainly a pretty good bluff, but it did not work.

The Indian seized Edna roughly and dragged her on along the rocks, the plucky girl talking to him all the while, as though he was her dearest friend.

George could not help her a bit, nor could Harry, for both were seized and their hands tied behind them.

If it was really a whistle from the canoe that had given the Indians their order they did not seem disposed to wait for any further instructions from Fitz and his gang, for all three prisoners were hurried on with ceremony and they had advanced but a short distance when they passed into a cave opening in under the bluff.

Edna was in advance, Harry came next and George last. There was no rear guard, all the other Indians having led off in front.

It was dark in the cave and as soon as they entered it one of the Indians lighted a torch, and, waving it before him, led the way.

There seemed to be a regular beaten path through the cave and George saw that it led in the direction of the House of Skulls.

They had not gone far when George made another discovery of considerable importance, which was nothing more or less than the interesting fact that the young buck who was leading him along was very drunk.

He was so far gone, in fact, that he kept stumbling and falling as he could do to keep his hold on George's arm.

It was this same Indian who had done the tying for George's band, too, and he did it so badly that before they had gone far George became aware that he could easily slip his hands out of the leather ropes.

Should he do it?

Would it be right to abandon Harry and Edna?

George thought it over and came to the conclusion that his chance of helping them was a hundred per cent. better if he did than if he allowed himself to be dragged on to the House of Skulls, to which he had no doubt this underground passage through the bluffs would sooner or later lead them.

Quietly he loosened his hands; then, turning suddenly upon the drunken Indian, he dealt him a knockout blow alongside the head which sent the fellow down upon the sandy floor of the cave like a log.

He had chosen his chance well, for the other Indians had just passed out of sight around a projection in the rocky wall.

For a moment George stood still waiting for results, for the move had been accomplished noiselessly and he did not want to alarm the Indians on ahead.

There was no danger. The Indian never moved.

"Heavens! I hope I haven't killed him!" thought George.

He bent down over the man and soon discovered that he was breathing all right. It seemed to him that he had passed out of a state of momentary unconsciousness from the blow into a drunken sleep.

George instantly made the best of his discovery and took away the Indian's knife and a good revolver. There was no rifle to get, so having accomplished all he could he groped his way back toward the mouth of the cave.

"I'm off overland for the House of Skulls," he determined. "Surely it must be better for Edna and Harry to have me free than a prisoner like themselves."

He had scarcely gained the entrance to the cave when he heard some one shout outside and a lot of loud talking followed, and he could hear Fitz's voice among the rest.

"They are all coming in here!" gasped George. "Heavens! What shall I do? My name is mud if they catch me!"

He looked around for a place to hide and soon spied a big boulder which had rolled down on the shore outside, a few steps beyond the entrance to the cave.

George dropped on his hands and knees and looked out. It was just as he had supposed.

The canoes were already alongside the stranded steamer and a number of the Indians were climbing aboard, while another party, half Indians and half whites, were coming along over the rocks, led by Fitz himself.

"Come on, boys!" Fitz was saying. "We want to hustle up to the House of Skulls and settle this business. These two fellows must die—I can't be bothered with them. The girl is my prize, though; I mean to marry her and nobody must interfere."

"Oh, that's your plan, is it?" thought George. "Well, we will see about that."

He crept rapidly over the ledge and crawled in behind the boulder, when just as he started to rise a man suddenly sprang upon him from further around the rock.

"Hold on, there!" he hissed, covering George with a cocked revolver. "Stop where you are! You have come far enough!"

CHAPTER XXII.

PRISONERS IN THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

While George Brandon was running into new difficulties and dangers Edna and Harry were still prisoners and in a fair way to learn something of the secrets of the House of Skulls.

There was no chance of escape for them. While the Indians had probably all been indulging too freely in firewater, they were by no means drunk, with the sole exception of the one put in charge of George, and they kept straight on through the cave, or rather the underground passage, until suddenly daylight loomed up ahead and they came out upon the side of the hill directly opposite the House of Skulls.

There was no opportunity for Harry and Edna to exchange a word, for the Indians kept them well apart, hurrying them down the hill and then up on the other slope, until the long house was reached, where they entered and paused before the altar, all hands crowding into the room where the grimacing skulls looked down upon them.

Here they paused and for a few moments stood around the altar in silence. What they were waiting for Harry could not guess, but the situation was soon explained by the entrance of an old Indian, whom Harry and Edna immediately recognized as one of the pair who had so strangely disappeared behind the altar on the night of their first visit to the House of Skulls.

Without speaking to any one, these two walked up to the altar, and, bending down, were seen to do something to a large, flat stone which lay apparently half embedded in the ground behind the altar itself.

Then the secret was out in a moment, the stone swung down and hung suspended as though fixed upon two pivots, which, as a matter of fact, it was.

Between the stone, as it then hung, and the altar there was plenty of room for a man to pass and there also was a flight of stone steps beneath leading down into the darkness under the House of Skulls.

"So this is the road we have got to travel now," thought Harry, and he was right.

The two old Indians, who were evidently medicine men or priests, led the way and the procession moved on down into the dark depths and all in solemn silence; the torches were lighted again and when they came to the bottom of the steps they entered a large cavern with low walls and roof all studded with stalactites; through this they passed for a considerable distance, always descending, until at length they emerged into the long, narrow valley where lay the Indian village which they had seen from the top of the mountain at a distance from the wall.

"That's I suppose," thought Harry, and now he looked around for George, puzzled at his disappearance, and all but forgot him for the first time, for while they were in the House of Skulls he supposed George to be in the crowd which lay about the door.

If the Indians missed their other prisoner, too, they showed it by no sign. The fact was they had missed him long ago and had sent two of their number back to look for him, but this, of course, Harry and Edna could not know and they were both most dreadfully worried on George's account.

A great crowd of squaws and papooses came out to meet the party and now the silence was broken and the chatter of voices all up-talking the guttural language of these Indians was deafening.

The prisoners were now led to a large hut and turned loose inside, the door being closed behind them and two Indians remaining on guard outside.

"Well!" exclaimed Edna, now that they found a chance to speak to each other for the first time. "This is an interesting state of affairs, I must say. What in the world do you suppose they mean to do with us, Hal, and where's George?"

Here were two very natural questions and they were also ones to which Harry had no answer and an hour passed before there was any break in the monotony of their confinement in the hut, which was so dirty that for a long time Edna positively refused to sit down, although she was compelled to it in the end.

At last came a cry of the Indians, a shout and then followed the familiar voice of the Indian medicine man, looking much as when Harry had last seen him, with the same air of lazy indifference and the same drawl in his voice when he spoke.

"Aw, Harry, how are you, deah boy?" he said. "How do, Edna? So you wouldn't wait for me to come back on board the Rocket? Don't you think it wasn't altogether pleasant there for you, but still I would have made it pleasant for you if you had only said the word."

Edna looked at the Indian curiously, but made no reply. "Sally, eh?" said Fitz. "Well, we will fix all that in time. I suppose you want to know where George is. Well, I will tell you, for it is altogether too much trouble to keep secrets. George managed to escape my men, but we will find him, don't you fret yourselves. It's only a question of time."

Still Edna, silent and Harry, following her example, did the same.

"Why don't you speak?" demanded Fitz, dropping his dudish manner all at once. "Are you both tongue-tied? Don't you want to know what I intend to do with you? Don't think that you are going to Miss me this way."

"I don't speak because I have nothing to say to such a scoundrel as you are, George Connelly," said Harry. "As to what you intend to do with us, I presume it will be just what you please, you will never be in our power, as we are now."

"Same here," added Harry. "It's war between us, Fitz. I'm only watching my chance, but I'll tell you right now what my opinion of you is, if you want to know. You're a thief and a scoundrel and the most ungrateful fellow I ever met."

Fitz laughed carelessly.

"Just so," he said. "All very true. Now, let me tell you something, Harry. I mean to make you my wife. You are going off with me on my next cruise on the Rocket. And let

me tell you someth'ng, Brown. These Indians, who are my friends, hold an annual festival in the House of Skulls to-night. At that festival it is the custom to add one skull to their collection, or more if they come handy, and in order to do this they sacrifice any prisoners they happen to have on hand. When we first came here I got into a quarrel with the chief—that's the time you saw me lassoed—and I thought that my skull was destined to go up on the wall, but since then I have made it up with them, although in doing it I had trouble with some of my own crew, and the result was that little racket on the rocks that I think you saw. It's all over now and we are better friends than ever, and those fellows who thought they could down me—no matter what the cause of our quarrel was—will be hunted down to the last man and their skulls will go up on the wall along with yours and George Brandon's. That's the program. The show comes off at midnight, and, let me tell you, Brown, there is no more help for you and George than if you were already dead, unless Edna consents to become my wife, in which case your lives will be spared and you will both be sent back to 'Frisco or to Alaska, just as comes handy. You can chew over that for a while. By the way, one of the squaws will bring you in some dinner presently. Tra-la-la! See you later, Edna. By-by, Harry, old boy."

And Fitz, with a silly smile on his face, sauntered out of the hut and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GEOEGE STUMBLES INTO GOOD LUCK.

It was a desperate situation in which Harry and Edna now found themselves, that cannot be denied, but we must leave them in it and return to George, whom we left interviewing the man who had so suddenly confronted him there behind the rock.

It would have been exciting enough if there had been only one man to interview, but as a matter of fact there were six.

They were all lying flat on the ground behind the big boulder and all were armed with rifles.

One, who seemed to be the leader, was watching the entrance to the cave, toward which Fitz and his men were now making their way over the rocks.

"Hist, Sam! Hist! Don't let him say a word!" this man ~~blew~~ ~~blow~~. "Clap your hand over his mouth. We'll interview him ~~later~~. We must keep our eye on Crowninshield and his gang. I want to see if Charley is with them. I think—yes, there he is!"

So George, who was at once seized, was simply held a prisoner until the last of Fitz's party had entered the cave.

The men now all sprang up and began to talk.

"There is no need to be afraid that we will be ~~seen now~~, boys," said the man. "The point keeps those fellows who

went aboard the Rocket from catching on to us and so does this rock. Now, then, young fellow, who are you? One of the sealskin pirates? One of the Crowninshield gang?"

"That's exactly what I am not," replied George, with all the calmness he could muster. "I am an independent American and not a pirate nor a member of any gang, and you Kanucks may as well understand it, too."

The man laughed.

"How do you know that we are Kanucks?" he asked.

"I know it by your talk," replied George; "I've seen enough of you west coast Canadians to be able to pick you out anywhere. Where you come from, though, and what you are doing on this island, I don't pretend to know."

"That will do for you," laughed the man. "You are a slick talker, but I guess you are one of the gang all right."

"You have no business to say so until you have heard who I am and what I am," replied George. "I'd like to know your name?"

"Oh, my name is Davidson," replied the man. "I'm Captain Davidson, of New Westminster. I happen to be sheriff of this district. I suppose you know that this island is Canadian soil?"

"I did not. Let me introduce myself, however. My name is George Brandon. I am in the employ of Doubleday & Downer, of San Francisco. I was wrecked on the steamer Sea Lion, and—"

"Hello! Hello! One of the passengers of the Sea Lion, eh?" broke in Captain Davidson. "My dear sir, I am rejoiced to meet you. When we found the wreck I told my brother here that the chances were we should find some of the passengers or crew on White Gull Island—that's this island, you understand—and now here we have run into you. What do you know about the seal skin pirates? Out with it all. I don't doubt that you will be of the greatest service to us. I suppose you have some papers or something or other about you to prove what you say."

Now George had a dozen letters from his firm snugly stowed away in his pocket and plenty of private papers of his own which set the sheriff's doubts at rest at once.

Thus instead of finding himself among enemies these men were suddenly transformed into friends, and half an hour later George and all of Captain Davidson's party stood on the bluff facing the House of Skulls, having passed through the long cave and come out on the shore of Blizzard Bay.

George and Captain Davidson had come to a perfect understanding also. The whole story of the wreck of the Sea Lion had been told and George now found himself looking down upon a trim little steamer lying at anchor near the wreck.

It was the Canadian revenue cutter Julia, and Captain Davidson was her commander. There was a crew of twenty-six men, all sworn deputy sheriffs, who had come to White Gull Island for no other purpose than to capture the Hon. Fitz, alias the notorious Captain Crowninshield.

"So that's the House of Skulls, is it?" remarked Captain Davidson. "Well, I've seen it before. I may as well admit

Now, look here, Mr. Brandon, this fellow Fitz, as you call him, is as slippery as an eel. Many is the time he has escaped me, and once on this very island, by disappearing in the House of Skulls, just as you describe, but this time I think I have got him foul unless he has seen our boat, which I don't think, seeing that it has just come into the bay after landing us on the rocks long before the Rocket came around into that cove. What you want is to recover your gold and your friends—"

"My friends first and the gold second," interrupted George.

"Just so," replied Captain Davidson. "It is all one, my boy, and we are going to help you to do it, but what I want is to capture Crowninshield and his whole crew, and, my plans being all laid, I can't change them. You will have to be patient for a while."

"How long shall we remain here?"

"Till midn'ght," replied the captain. "Understand me, I have a spy right in with the gang. I am expecting every minute to hear from him and then I shall know better what to do, and—"

"Look! Look!" exclaimed one of the men, pointing toward the House of Skulls.

A man had just appeared in the doorway. Looking warily around, he came out and hurried down the hill.

"That's Charley!" cried Captain Davidson. "Now we shall know all about it. George Brandon, that is my spy!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

The day passed drearily on and in the evening Harry and Edna were still in the hut.

Fitz's food had been brought to them, but Edna declared she would rather go hungry than eat the horrid mess of raw fish mixed with something which resembled cracked beans half boiled, and even Harry was only able to taste it, hungry as he was.

Night came at last and Fitz had not again showed himself. Whether he had told the truth or not and intended to make good his word the prisoners could only guess, for neither of the Indians on guard spoke a word of English. Indeed, they were a very queer crew, who several times opened the door of the hut and tried to make friends with them; each time he was pushed roughly, so there seemed to be nothing to be gained in that way.

As the day went on the excitement in the Indian village increased in full war paint and feathers. In and around the camp, children were running about, shouting and every now and then a group of squaws would hurry past the hut dressed in barbaric

finery, while big wooden drums were beaten vigorously all the evening, making a deafening noise.

Wearily the evening dragged on. It was now almost midnight. Filled with a thousand fears, Harry and Edna sat on the floor talking in rather a gloomy strain, it must be admitted, when the door was suddenly thrown open and Fitz came staggering in very drunk, but with an air of attempted dignity which would have been comical under other circumstances.

He shut the door carefully and put his finger to his lips for silence.

"Edna," he said, staggering up to the plucky girl, "the time has come. I alone can save Harry. Say the word and promise that you will be my wife and it shall be done."

Edna and Harry had both jumped up when Fitz came in and now stood facing him.

Harry was about to speak, but Edna nudged him with her elbow to keep still.

"Come here, Fitz," she said aloud. "I'll say it. I've been thinking it over, and—oh, you villain! I've got you now!"

She flung her arms about Fitz's neck and squeezed his head against her side until he was almost choked, at the same time clapping her hand over his mouth.

"Quick, Harry!" she whispered. "You know what I told you. The chance has come. Act, boy! Act!"

Harry did not need to be told twice. He and Edna had planned it all out, but it had been like hoping against hope to suppose that so good an opportunity would have offered.

Harry threw himself upon the struggling Fitz and thrust his handkerchief into his mouth, at the same time dealing him a knock-out blow alongside the head which sent him to the ground.

"Done," said Edna. "Off with his coat and hat. Fix yourself up quick before he comes to himself. What's this, a revolver? It may come handy. Now, are you ready? Come on!"

It was a bold move. Fitz was already groaning. There was no time to be lost.

Harry, dressed now in a disguise good enough to deceive the half drunken Indian guards, seized the lantern which Fitz had carried and boldly threw open the door of the hut, carefully closing it behind him.

The two Indians merely glanced at him.

"Look after the fellow inside," said Harry, imitating Fitz's voice and his uncertain walk as well as he could. "I'm going with the squaw."

The Indians merely grunted, but made no move.

It was part of the bargain that Fitz should go away with Edna, if he chose to do so, and the Indians were completely deceived.

Now, the hut stood on the outskirts of the village and close to the exit of the cave beneath the House of Skulls.

Harry had taken particular note of this when they were brought down and he and Edna had discussed this very situation again and again until they felt that they knew exactly what to do.

Down in the village the big drums were beating and the In-

days were already forming in solemn procession to begin their ascent out of the hidden valley to the House of Skulls. Walking boldly around the hut unobserved by any one, Harry and Edna entered the cave.

They had made the most of their time, for already Fitz was on his feet and trying to pull his muddled wits together.

While he was thus engaged Harry and Edna were running at full speed through the cave and up the steps, which would soon take them out under the altar and into the House of Skulls.

"Here they come!" panted Harry when they reached the steps. "Faster, Edna! Faster!"

It was not long to the last step, and the enemy was right behind them before they were half way up the steps.

It was dark, and all were drunk, and all for men, all pretty well intoxicated.

The procession was not yet on the move, for the Indians as a body cared but little for Fitz and his affairs, although he had paid them well for the help they had given him in his evil work.

"If we can only move the stone!" gasped Harry. "If we can't we are lost!"

But they could and did, for Harry perceived the secret bolt the instant he flashed his lantern upon the stone.

It dropped as he touched it and they passed through not an instant too soon.

"Hold on, there! You are our prisoners!" exclaimed a voice, and a dozen men sprang up from behind the altar.

"Harry! Edna! Oh, this is great! Captain, these are my friends!"

It was George. Captain Davidson and his men were with them. So was Charley, the spy. They had been waiting for the Indians to bring their prisoners up and were all ready for them when they came.

"Lay for Fitz, George!" gasped Harry. "He's right behind us—don't let him escape."

"Out with the lantern!" whispered George. "Now, then, all hands down behind the altar again."

They had but a moment to wait.

Fitz was first up and his men followed him.

"Where are they?" he called out thickly, waving a pine torch around, its flaring light flashing upon the skulls.

Well, Fitz found out in a hurry where they were, for in an instant he and his men were looking at the barrels of a dozen revolvers.

"Up hands, Captain Crowninshield!" cried the sheriff. "I've got you at last!"

When a story is ended the best thing to do is to wind it up as quickly as possible, and that is just the way we propose to handle this story of the House of Skulls.

Having got what they wanted, Captain Davidson and his men concluded that the best thing they could do was to beat a hasty retreat, and that they did without the least ceremony, leaving the Indians to enjoy their captured prisoners without disturbance. And they did, for the Indians, as usual, the Indians, were lay waiting for them in Blizzard Bay.

They were not followed by the Indians. So long as the House of Skulls was not disturbed they did not care. The story of the sacrifice was only one of Fitz's lies.

Once on board the steamer moved around into the cove, where it took in tow the Rocket, already captured by the sheriff and guarded by his men.

It was a night of triumph for the boy miners of Blizzard Bay, but it was a bad time for the Hon. Fitz, who went to New Westminster in irons and was duly lodged in jail in company with fully half his gang.

George, Harry and Edna took the next regular steamer from New Westminster down to San Francisco and their gold went with them, minus a liberal reward for the sheriff and each one of his men.

Edna had stories for the Morning Call to last her a month; and, what was better, she did not care whether the paper accepted them or not, for when the gold dust and nuggets were disposed of she, as well as George and Harry, found herself on the right side of "Easy street;" in short they were almost rich.

Three months later Fitz went up for ten years, and on the same day George, Harry and Edna returned to White Gull Island, with a band of workmen and every facility for mining.

A company had been formed and the claim duly located under the laws of Canada in the name of Sheriff Davidson, who, being a British subject, was able to take title.

Jumping from that date to three years later we need only add that the Blizzard Bay Mining Company proved a big success and its owners are rapidly becoming rich.

George and Mrs. George, formerly Miss Edna Blyburn, live on the island part of the time, but are oftener in San Francisco. Harry is superintendent and stays there all the year round.

Quite a settlement has sprung up around Blizzard Bay now and houses and quartz mines and mining shafts are to be seen on all sides.

The Indians are perfectly friendly and the stone behind the altar is always turned now, for the road from the prosperous mining town of Blizzard Bay to Indiantown, as the village in the valley is called, is through the House of Skulls.

Next week's issue will contain "DAN AND HIS DOUBLE; OR, THE CHURCH UNDER THE RIVER." By Allan Arnold.

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SPECIAL NOTICE.—All back numbers of this week's paper, except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 51, 53 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91 to 94, 98 to 100, 102, 103, 105, 107 to 111, 116, 119, 122, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 174, 178 to 181, 184, 186, 192, 200, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 272, 277, 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from your dealer, send an order to the office of Publishers, 168 West 23d Street, New York City, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

CAPTURED BY ARAB SLAVERS IN AFRICA.

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

I had been with the Worumbu people about ten months when a number of us started off to the north to visit what was then a remnant of a once powerful tribe called the Umbasi. Epidemics and wars had broken their power and reduced their numbers until only about 500 were left. They lived in a valley on the main branch of the Lufiji River, and for several years had lived in peace and undisturbed. Their women wove cloth of grass, and the men were noted for the shields and sandals they made of rhinoceros hide. We took along some wire and cloth to trade with them, and our party numbered fourteen.

It was a journey of sixty miles, and we had covered forty miles of the distance when an event occurred to show the childish and superstitious nature of the African. As we rounded a thicket we came upon a rhinoceros lying on his back and his legs standing stiffly in the air. It was a laughable sight to me and it was made all the more ridiculous by his subsequent antics.

He was not dead but asleep, and as soon as he heard us he made the most frantic efforts to get up. It seemed that he had got down in a soft spot and that his weight had actually carried him down until he rested in a wedge-shaped space.

When he came to get up he found the effort too much for him, and his struggles and snorts convulsed me with laughter. After a quarter of an hour he got a leverage and rolled himself out of the hole, but he was so thoroughly frightened that he ran off at the top of his speed, falling head over heels over a stone as he went.

The band at once held a council, and the leader gravely said:

"Did any one among you ever see the beast in such a position before?"

No one had.

"Did he not place himself in our path as a sign?"

It was more than likely.

"Very well; we will return and make a fresh start some other day. If we are obstinate and insist on going ahead, we shall say we may not all be killed."

I sought to argue and reason them from taking such a step, and in this I was supported by two of the other men. After wrangling for an hour it was decided to turn back, but the three of us were at liberty to go on if we so desired. We decided to go and at once moved off, thinking the others might follow, but they did not, and at sundown we were among the Umbasi.

They gave us a cordial greeting, and we prolonged our visit for four days. We left the valley early in the morning, the party well loaded, and we had traveled for about three hours, and were walking in single file in a path winding through tall grass, when each of us was tripped up at the same moment, and a great shout proved the capture of the party of natives.

After a short time the Worumbu's were all captured, but I was relieved to find that we had fallen in with a party of natives.

We were bound in a line, arms behind our backs, and

when jerked to our feet and forced along to the northwest I felt pretty sure that we had been made prisoners by native slave hunters.

It was soon discovered, of course, that I was white. The captors were at first filled with dismay, and would have turned me loose, supposing that I was the head of some other slave hunting party. But I hesitated to take advantage of the offer.

I knew that I could not find my way a mile in the African forest alone, and the chances were that I would be killed within a few hours by serpents or wild beasts. While I hesitated, the fellows made up their minds to take me along, and we traveled all day to the northwest, with only a couple of brief halts.

At dusk we arrived at a camp, and there I saw several Arabs and about 200 negro captives. There were only about twenty-five men among them, the remainder being women and half grown boys and girls.

While my companions were turned into the inclosure with the other captives, I was conducted to the tent of the Arabs. They were regular slave dealers, and as repulsive and wicked-looking men as I ever saw. One of them could speak pretty fair English, and of course he asked me my nationality, and how I came to be among the Worumbu people.

I knew this was coming and was prepared for it. Had I replied that I was a British sailor it would have settled my case at once, and I should have probably been killed on the spot. I said I was an American sailor who had been wrecked on the coast and made prisoner, and that I looked upon the present adventure as opening a way for me to reach some port on the coast. I would be glad to go along with them as a guard until they could put me in the way of reaching the sea.

My story made a hit. I was white and could be trusted. I was an American, and therefore had less abhorrence of the slave trade than other nationalities. They would secure my services for my keep, and when through with me would sell me into slavery with the others.

I knew they reasoned this way, but I had plans of my own.

I received plenty to eat, a loaded musket and was detailed to help guard the inclosure in which the poor people were confined.

There was small chance of any one getting away, as all were bound hand and foot, and only two guards were needed. The other, who was an Abyssinian, and quite an old man, was on the opposite side of the camp, and I hoped to get down among the blacks and find my two friends, and tell them of my plans.

I found this was impossible, however, as they were directly under the eyes of the other guard, and could not move from the stakes to which they were fastened.

I presume I was watched that night, but if so the Arabs could find no cause for complaint. I was relieved an hour after midnight, and when I awoke next morning the slaves were being fed preparatory to a start. I was very active in helping to prepare for the start.

There was considerable camp equipage to be carried, and twenty or thirty bales of goods for traffic.

The men and boys were selected as carriers, and the entire number were paired together two by two. In some

cases, after the yokes were on, the people were connected together by four or six, but those who carried the burdens were exempt from this further precaution. It so happened that, without any assistance on my part, the two Worumbu men were yoked together.

When they were so yoked, and among the Arabs, and apparently entering into the hellish work with great zest, they bestrode all manner of places of reprobation.

Just before the start, however, I gave them a sign to put them on their guard, and to warn them that I was playing a part.

The force guarding the captives, when the march finally began, consisted of three Arab traders, three or four Abyssinian drivers, and six natives from Masailand, who were paid by the day or mile.

These last, though native Africans, were far more unfeeling and cruel in their treatment of the prisoners than the Arabs, often misusing them to hear their cries of pain and anguish.

When strung out on the march we covered a distance of half a mile, even where the ground was open.

When obliged to follow a path the head of the column was at least a mile from the rear.

They gave me ten extra cartridges and a large knife as we were ready to go, and sent me to the head of the column with two Abyssinians.

We went forward more or less where the ground was open, but in following a path were marched in Indian file, I being last.

Next to me came my Worumbu friends. The Arabs brought up the rear, and the Masai men were the leaders.

During the first day I had several opportunities to signal my Worumbu friends, and before all they knew that I was ready to take advantage of the first opportunity to escape. The only plan of escape I had was to release my friends at night, while I was on guard, but when night came they were so well secured and firmly yoked to the station that I could not make a move.

We were off again at an early hour next day, following the same order as before, and at about 10 o'clock in the forenoon my opportunity came.

We got into a path leading across a large swamp. The ground was dry now, but the grass was higher than our heads.

The path we followed by the marks left by wild animals, and at intervals crossed and recrossed right and left.

All of a sudden, as we tramped along, three or four buffaloes broke cover from the right and charged the two Abyssinians, the headmost of which was three paces ahead of me, and looking back over the people at the time.

It was a rush as if a puff of wind had swept over us, and came and went as quickly.

The two drivers were rapidly separated in the dash, and I could not see him, though his musket lay in the path.

The two drivers had fallen to the earth, and a stampede had started among the animals.

I dashed forward to the right and gathered up the cartridges and my knife. I was telling my Worumbu friends to pick up the gun, when I made a hurried search for cartridges and secured about fifteen.

It didn't take me above a minute, but as the column had halted, there was an alarm from the rear, and I could hear the Masai men calling to the captives to step aside and let them pass on their way to the front.

Behind the two Worumbu men were two men of the Umbashi tribe, who had been captured several days before we were.

The five of us made a dash up the path as fast as I got the cartridges, and were around the hill in half a minute.

As we rounded it we found the path split into three, and we turned to the right and put our best foot foremost.

To the four natives was the task of leading the rear guard. It was well that I did, for when we had run about half a mile one of the Masai men came running after us, and commanded a halt.

He was armed only with a spear, and though I stopped and made ready to fire on him he continued to approach, and I finally knocked him over with a bullet just as he was about to hurl his lance. Then I started off and overtook the natives, and we continued to run for three or four miles.

Then we halted, and I got the yokes off, and we now felt comparatively safe.

I did not want to go further until certain that the slave party would not pursue. We had three muskets and four valuable packs, and I very much doubted if they would give up the chase so easily. I therefore got the men into a thicket beside the path, which was now running over hard ground.

I said to myself that we had better stop there, when three Masai men were seen coming along the path at a dog trot.

We were ready at the same opposite.

My man went down, killed in his tracks. One of the others was wounded, and the third was hit not at all, but the two natives sprang out and soon killed the pair.

We got another musket, this one a long one, two knives, three knives and a lot of cartridges, and leaving the horses to the wild beasts we headed to the south and heard nothing further from our pursuers.

On reaching our village the adventure created the most wonderful excitement and such was the awe and admiration won by the exploit that had I been a marplot I could easily have caused the head of our nation to be made.

For a week Thomas Wade, a prosperous farmer in Tuckahoe District, Henrico County, Va., dreamed each night of a buried box bulging with gold in ingots and ancient coins. The spot where this treasure was secreted was indicated unvaryingly in his dreams by an old stump, which he recognized as being on his farm. With the assistance of Constable J. H. Henley, he went to the place indicated in his dream, and after digging for several hours his sharp spade struck the box, which he at once took to the Bull Run Gold and Silver Company.

On examination it was found to be a box of solid gold, and the goldsmiths estimated its weight at 100 pounds. It contained three big copper cents of ancient date and three diamonds.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 12, 1913.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

One of the familiar sights on the streets of a Japanese town is the pancake woman, who, with her little brazier of coals and her tiny frying pan, is usually found on a corner not far from a school. She has a bowl full of delicious batter, a ladle and a cake turner, and there is apt to be a hungry crowd around her little stand as soon as school is out, for not many of the children are able to resist the smell of the crisp pancakes, at least if they have any money. For a very small coin a child may fry and turn his own cakes, and happy is the one who has a number of coins in his little kimono sleeve and can fry and eat to his heart's content.

It was not until recent years discovered (or if discovered its significance was not appreciated) that the pecan will not grow true to seed; in fact, there is not a single case on record of a seedling which has borne nuts like those of the parent tree, says *Outing*. A comprehension of this vital feature considerably lessened the value of those orchards which have been set with seedling stock, though some of those trees themselves produced fine nuts. The only difference between the so-called "paper-shell" pecan and the fruit from the wild tree of the forest is that the former has been grown on a budded or grafted tree, the scions being from a named variety. In such a way the grower can be certain of the kind of nuts which will be produced.

China is so well suited by natural conditions for the production of silk that even the most antiquated and unscientific methods cannot deprive her of first rank in that industry. In Japan everything connected with the silk business is scientifically regulated. No silkworm is permitted to hatch unless the egg has passed scientific inspection. Mulberry trees are cultivated on scientific principles. Similar methods are pursued in other countries where silk is produced. But in China these things are almost entirely disregarded, and yet the Flowery Kingdom keeps near the head in the production. Her undeveloped resources in this industry are so enormous that it is predicted that when China adopts modern methods she will give a new turn to the silk business of the world.

Out on the Southwestern, ever-warm prairies the goat-raising industry has been followed for many years. The best breed for the region they call the Persian, but it is not the Paseng, nor is it of the Angora type; it is a much larger, stronger, even hardier animal, and the books do not describe it. The male possesses enormous, straight, but twisted horns, flaring over his back, and long, silky brown and yellow hair. The female has small, slightly curved horns and a short coat. In a country where the coyotes and timber wolves, the pumas and lynxes get a third of the calves and a large percentage of the colts, and where sheep can be raised only by shepherds, these goats wander at will continually and suffer no loss. Turn a dozen nannies out with their great horned lords and, from a knowledge of the probable births, estimate on the increase. In a year make a count and the count will tally with the estimate.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

"Mrs. Codgers is dreadfully afraid of embonpoint," remarked Mrs. Gadsley. "Is that so?" chirped Mrs. Wopper. "My favorite aunt had it, and the poor thing just wasted away!"

The Stranger—Are you quite sure that was a marriage license you gave me last month? The Official—Of course! What's the matter? The Stranger—I've lived a dog's life ever since.

"Well, Freddie, dear, did you give the man at the post office the money and then mail the letter?" "No, mamma, I still have the money; I put the letter in when he wasn't looking."

"Bobby, you must go to church with me this morning." "Mamma, why don't you say, 'Bobby, wouldn't you like to go to church with me?'" "Well, Bobby, wouldn't you like to go to church with me this morning?" "Nope."

One day the children in a New York school were given a lesson about the cow. The next day a cocoanut was brought in for their inspection. When the big nut came to Rosie Goldberg, she happened to shake it and heard something lapping inside. "What's that?" she asked. "That's milk." Rosie took another look at the nut, and asked: "Did the cow lay it?"

The bright little surgery at the rear of the doctor's house was occupied by two—the medical man and a patient, who was being attended to for the last time, seeing that he had got over his illness. "Yes, yes," said the doctor; "you're all right now. You needn't come here again." "But, sir," remarked the patient, "wot aboot der bill? I ain't got mooch money. Vill you dake der bill out in trade?" The sawbones looked the man up and down. "Well, I might do so," he replied. "What is your business?" "I am der leader of der liddle Cherman band, sair. Ve vill blay in front of your house every evening for von month."

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